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HISTORY OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MATH AND MISSION

By
SWAMI GAMBHIRANANDA

37

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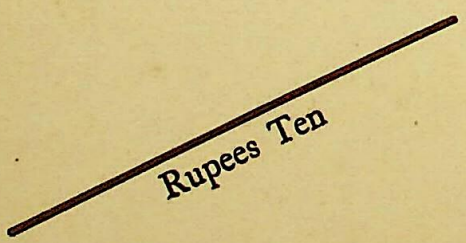
Tracing the development of the representative institutions of the Rāmakrishna Math and Mission, the book primarily sets forth the actualisation of the ideas and ideals taught by Shri Rāmakrishna and Swāmi Vivekānanda.

Christopher Isherwood says in the *Foreword,* "Spiritual truth is eternal, but it has to be restated and redemonstrated in a human life in order that it may solve the varying problems of each succeeding epoch. Rāmakrishna's teaching is our modern gospel. He lived and taught for us, not for the men of two thousand years ago ; and the Rāmakrishna Movement is responsible for the spreading of his gospel among us, here and now. For this reason alone, the Movement must be regarded as the most important of all existing religious movements, no matter how large or influential or venerable the others may be."



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By
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With a Foreword by
CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD

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PREFACE

The present volume commemorates the diamond jubilee of the Rāmakrishna Mission. This also necessitates the recording of the history of the Rāmakrishna Math, for the Mission is a collateral growth of the Math and would have remained unexplained without its help. In tracing the development of the sister institutions a little elaborately for the first time, we were often hampered by a lack of recorded evidence. Nevertheless, no pains have been spared to verify facts. The authenticity of the volume is heightened by the able editorship of Swāmi Mādhavānanda, with general advice from Swāmis Vireshwarānanda, Tejasānanda and Nihshreyasānanda, the four constituting a Board of Editors appointed by the authorities at Belur. We are indebted to the eminent writer, Christopher Isherwood, for his appreciative Foreword as well as for improving the language of the book, and to the well-known historians, Āchārya Jadunāth Sarkār and Dr. R. C. Majumdār, for reading the manuscript and offering thoughtful comments or constructive suggestions.

Through the progressive development of representative institutions, the book primarily sets forth the actualisation of the ideas and ideals taught by Shri Rāmakrishna and Swāmi Vivekānanda, though personalities, especially of the leaders and some pioneers, are introduced sparingly as a matter of historical necessity and to facilitate understanding.

It has not been possible to give the exact dates for some important events, while in other cases only months or years are mentioned, additional detail being considered cumbersome.

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The history ends with April 30, 1957. As far as possible, we have not crammed it with statistics, a few illustrative figures being thought sufficient. The Appendices will help the inquiring reader a little more. The Index will be useful in connecting the topics and names of institutions or persons that have got scattered owing to the chronological treatment. In all Indian proper names, the long *a* sound (as in *far*) has been indicated by *ā*, except where the spelling is anglicised. References to quotations have been given. If the page number does not tally in any particular edition, the reader will kindly look a little before or after. Some illustrations, mostly relating to the early period, have also been added. It is hoped the book in its present form will be widely appreciated by the public.

September 30, 1957 THE AUTHOR

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FOREWORD

This book requires little introduction. The need for its appearance is self-evident. Until now, there has been no comprehensive history of what is, certainly, the most significant religious movement of our times.

The Rāmakrishna Movement is unique because its Founder was unique. Even those who do not wish to believe that Sri Rāmakrishna was a Son of God, like Jesus of Nazareth, must surely admit that he is incomparably the greatest spiritual leader produced by mankind in the past two centuries. (This claim is almost absurdly modest!) And who, in the world's recent history, can stand beside Rāmakrishna's disciples, Vivekānanda and Brahmānanda?

Spiritual truth is eternal, but it has to be restated and redemonstrated in a human life in order that it may solve the varying problems of each succeeding epoch. Rāmakrishna's teaching is our modern gospel. He lived and taught for us, not for the men of two thousand years ago; and the Rāmakrishna Movement is responsible for the spreading of his gospel among us, here and now. For this reason alone, the Movement must be regarded as the most important of all existing religious movements, no matter how large or influential or venerable the others may be. This statement may sound startling, as of today. It is always hard to recognize the power and magnitude of a new spiritual force; and the Rāmakrishna Movement is *very* new, historically speaking. The growth of such a force can only be traced in retrospect, after centuries have passed. By the time the historians have become aware of a great spiritual revolution, that revolution has already com-

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pleted itself and spent its energy, and a new revolution is about to take place!

So much for the spiritual role which is being played by the Rāmakrishna Movement. Its social role is almost equally significant. One of the basic facts of our epoch is a profound change in relations between East and West, as colonialism is forced to yield to the claims of emergent nationalism. Much blood has been shed in the process, and much bitterness created. There are, however, forces at work to bring East and West together on a new basis of equality, respect and understanding. One of these forces is the Rāmakrishna Movement, and it is peculiarly well fitted for the task because its Founders intended, from the beginning, that it should serve East and West impartially.

Sri Rāmakrishna is the first great teacher to deliver a dual message, consciously addressed to the East and to the West as two separate though interrelated cultures. Vivekānanda carried that message to America and Europe, telling his listeners both what Rāmakrishna's teachings had to say to oriental Hindus and also what they had to say to occidental Christians. He made no attempt to convert the Western peoples away from Christianity to a cult of Rāmakrishna; and this wise policy has been followed by the centers he founded in the West. Thus the Christians' mistake in the Orient has been avoided. Conversion, in the old-fashioned sense, was anyhow often short-lived and skin-deep, and, in many cases, a disguised function of colonialism.

The Rāmakrishna Movement has also avoided the much more deadly mistake of trying to create a cult of itself. It has never become, in this sense, a 'Church' or claimed to be Rāmakrishna's 'Body' or viceregent on earth. The sane, humble and frequently humorous tone of this book, with its frank admission of weaknesses, errors in judgment and clashes of personality, should

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convince every reader that the men who are now carrying on Rāmakrishna's mission are incapable of thus perverting it to further their own ambition and increase their prestige. May the Movement always have such leaders!

When a religious movement becomes a 'Church', it must inevitably become involved in politics. Since the Church is of such paramount importance—say its adherents—it must be sustained and defended by any means, fair or foul. It must be protected by a foreign policy and by the making of alliances, even if its allies are men whose hands are dirty with gold and blood. The Rāmakrishna Movement has, to its enormous credit, always refused to become politically involved—even in such a relatively noble and worthy cause as that of Indian independence; and this despite the fact that nearly all of its members must have had a strong sympathy for the nationalists. Some of these members, indeed, ended by feeling that it was their duty to take part in the struggle; but they very properly left the Movement before doing so, and thus avoided compromising it by their later actions.

When a religious movement claims the right to stand outside politics, it may earn unpopularity for itself in time of crisis; but this unpopularity will turn into respect, later. For no one, however much of a political fanatic he may be, really respects the man of God who joins him in abetting acts of violence. The professional soldier suspects and secretly despises the militant priest.

If the Rāmakrishna Movement had consisted only of contemplatives, leading lives of meditation in retirement from the world, its abstention from politics would not have been so difficult. But the Movement has always preserved a dual character—contemplative Math and socially active Mission. The Mission, with all its hospitals, schools and relief projects, is necessarily in-

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volved in the affairs of the world. It has had to learn how to accept help and cooperation in these projects while refusing to be governed by the worldly policies of its helpers. The reader of this book will be able to judge for himself how great are the difficulties of walking along the edge of this exquisitely narrow razor!

July 1957 CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD

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HISTORY OF
THE RAMAKRISHNA MATH AND MISSION

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SHRI RĀMAKRISHNA
(1836—1886)

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INSPIRATION

(1836—1885)

By 1867, Shri[1] Rāmakrishna, the God-intoxicated prophet of the New Age, had reached the end of his strenuous spiritual struggle. At Dakshineshwar on the Hooghly, five miles above Calcutta, he had been engaged in it for about twelve years and realised certain spiritual truths, viz., that the sole aim of human life is to attain God, that God-realisation can be proved by experiment, that all religions are true, that each man has to approach God in his own way, that men and women are essentially divine, that human relationship is best expressed in terms of service as worship, and that it is better to make positive efforts for progress than to be sorrowing over sin and moral lapses. This was the unique message he brought for the progress of the world, and such was its inherent strength that it could not remain confined even for a short while within the precincts of the Kāli temple at Dakshineshwar, or the boundaries of a small, backward village. Soon after Shri Rāmakrishna's victorious emergence from the spiritual struggle, divine dispensation gave him an urge for expression through conversation and personal contact. But can the seed sprout unless the ground is ready to receive it? Where were the competent recipients? At this juncture a vision assured him of their coming. Yet the yearning of his heart could brook no delay, for he was sick of talking with worldly people, and he longed for the promised company of true spiritual

[1] Pronounced in Bengali as Sri.

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aspirants. So "when during the evening service the temple rang with the sound of bells and conch-shells, he would climb to the roof of the building in the garden and writhing in anguish of heart cry at the top of his voice, 'Come, my boys! Oh, where are you? I cannot bear to live without you!'" (*Life of Shri Rāmakrishna*, p. 296).

To that fervent call first responded, in 1875, Keshab Chandra Sen, an outstanding leader of the Brāhmo Samāj, with his friends, colleagues and followers—Vijay Krishna Goswāmi, Pratāp Chandra Mazumdār, Trailokya Nāth Sānnyāl and others—who admired the saint of Dakshineshwar, propagated some of his ideals through their writings, embellished their own discourses with his imagery and modes of expression, and at times reorientated the life of the Samāj in the light of Shri Rāmakrishna's spiritual moods, fervour and vision. But they could not go the whole way with him, nor could they openly acknowledge his leadership. For they were steeped in Western thought and fascinated by Christian monotheism, and the rustic simplicity of Shri Rāmakrishna's Hindu beliefs offended their sense of cultural propriety and their religious outlook. All the same, Keshab's personal devotion to the Master bore fruit in another direction. It drew the pointed attention of the middle-class, intellectual aspirants of the day. For Keshab was not merely a Brāhmo leader; in a way he stood as a national hero retrieving the honour of India in the fields of culture and religion and meeting the challenge of the West on its own ground. For that was a period when India's hoary civilisation came under the sledge-hammer blows of science and Christianity. In self-defence India reacted through her Rām Mohan Roy, the founder of the Brāhmo Samāj in Bengal, and Dayānanda Saraswati, the founder of the Ārya Samāj

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in the Punjab, though neither of the Samājas accepted India's culture in toto. The Brāhmos picked and chose from the past and compromised with the present, while the Ārya Samāj wanted to revive, according to its own interpretation, the Vedic age of sacrifices, ignoring altogether the Upanishads and the rich latter-day flowering of Hinduism. In spite of their reforming spirit, both the organisations stemmed the tide of Western culture and saved India for the time being. Keshab was rightly honoured for all this as well as for his oratory, brilliant exposition and personal character. It was natural, therefore, that his acceptance, partial though it seemed to be, meant much for the cause that Shri Rāmakrishna represented. It gradually brought to the latter exactly those persons for whom his call had been sounded.

First came Rām Chandra Datta and his cousin Mano Mohan Mitra at the end of 1879. Surendra Nath Mitra followed them in the beginning of the next year. Gradually there gathered round the Master a group of staunch followers who openly acknowledged him as a prophet and were ready to propagate his message in every possible way. But they worked under two handicaps—they had their worldly preoccupations and spiritual preconceptions, which would not leave them free either to comprehend the Master's ideals in all their logical bearings or to work them out fully in life and society. In subscribing to the belief in Shri Rāmakrishna's avatarhood, they went far beyond Keshab, inasmuch as they not only recognised without any reservation the saintliness of his character and the uniqueness of his message, on which points Keshab also would agree, but they also bowed down to his prophetic leadership without any question. Henceforth they had no need to be apologetic about Hinduism, for it now stood redeemed in the personality of the Master. In the company of these devotees Shri Rāma-

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krishna too felt happy, though his mind remained unsatisfied, for he still wanted to capture the heart of "Young Bengal," on which alone could be erected his new edifice of spiritual regeneration for mankind. He was in search of some fresh, ardent and progressive minds which would find in him not a mere epitome of the glorious past, but the foreshadowing of a captivating future as well. Young Bengal also responded with enthusiasm. Keshab's recognition and the fuller acceptance by Rām Chandra and others soon attracted them, and they began to gather at the Master's feet in quick succession. There came to Dakshineshwar Narendra Nath Datta (at the end of 1881), Rākhāl Chandra Ghosh (middle of 1881), Jogindra Nāth Chaudhury, Bāburām Ghosh and Nitya Niranjan Ghosh (1881-82), Tārak Nāth Ghoshāl (1880-81), Sharat Chandra Chakravarti and his cousin Shashi Bhushan Chakravarti (October, 1883), Kāli Prasād Chandra (1884), Rakhturām or Lātu (about 1880), Hari Nāth Chattopādhyāy, Gangādhar Gangopādhyāy and Sāradā Prasanna Mitra (1884), Subodh Chandra Ghosh or Khokā, as he was better known (middle of 1884), and Hari Prasanna Chattopādhyāy (end of 1883). These young men were mostly unmarried and were at the time studying in the schools and colleges of Calcutta. Many others too, who had entered the world and were a little advanced in age, came during this period, among whom may be mentioned Balarām Bose, a landlord of Orissa, Mahendra Nāth Gupta, known later as Master Mahāshay or M., the writer of *The Gospel of Sri Rāmakrishna* in Bengali, Girish Chandra Ghosh, the celebrated actor-dramatist of Bengal, Debendra Nāth Mazumdār, the composer of songs, and Akshay Kumār Sen, the poet. To this group belonged Gopāl Chandra Ghosh or Gopāl Senior, a widower who later renounced the world and joined the younger devotees. For the

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purposes of this history we are more concerned with the younger aspirants. But before we come to deal with them and their achievements, we have to be better acquainted with the source of their inspiration. For at every turn these leaders of the Rāmakrishna Math and Mission acknowledge the Master as the real architect of the organisation named after him, the history of which we are going to trace. Narendra, or the latter-day Swāmi Vivekānanda, speaking before the Shakespeare Club of Pasadena, California, on January 27, 1900, said, "Now, all the ideas that I preach are only an attempt to echo his ideas. Nothing is mine originally except the wicked ones—everything, I say, which is false and wicked. But every word that I have ever uttered which is true and good, is simply an attempt to echo his voice" (*My Life and Mission,* p. 12). And when Lady Minto, the Vicereine of India, visiting the Belur Math in 1910, remarked that the Rāmakrishna Math was a creation of Swāmi Vivekānanda, Swāmi Shivānanda—Tārak Nāth Ghoshāl, whom we met a little earlier, and who was then a Trustee of the Math, at once corrected her saying, "We did not found this Order. It was the Master who brought it into being during his illness. At that time he instructed Swāmiji (Swāmi Vivekānanda, who is respectfully referred to thus by the members of the Order) and others as to how this Order was to be organised and conducted" (*Mahāpurush Shivānanda,* p. 155).

One thing that from the very outset struck the devotees with wonder, and served to engender faith in their hearts, was the sincerity and force with which each word issued from the lips of the Master; and yet the language was the simplest possible, and the illustrations and parables most homely. He talked of God and nothing else, and renunciation was his forte. He had no academic education, and yet he could offer the most

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reassuring solution to every spiritual problem that agitated the intellectuals of the age, and even pose counter-questions to send scientific minds away in a quandary. It required no expert to tell his questioners that behind those pregnant and glowing words lay the guarantee of the best part of a holy man's life spent in moral discipline, unrelenting pursuit of truth and the conquest of staggering heights of spirituality. Shri Rāmakrishna's words had life because they had been actually lived. For unless life accords with words, no man can be recognised as a saint. Besides, it was not merely by virtue of his sainthood that Shri Rāmakrishna spoke with authority, unlike the scribes and Pharisees, but also because he was a child of the Divine Mother in the real sense of the term. For he had merged his personality absolutely in Her, so as not to be able to utter the word "I" in the ordinary sense of the term; it was always the Mother speaking through him. That was how his disciples or devotees found him. But what had he been before? Here is the story.

Shortly before the day-break of February 18, 1836, Gadādhar Chattopādhyāy, as Shri Rāmakrishna was known in childhood, was born in a poor but pious brahmin family of Kāmārpukur, a village in the Hooghly district of Bengal. His father Kshudirām once went to Gayā and there dreamt that the Lord Vishnu was telling him that He would be born as his son. We have this on the authority of the Master himself. His mother Chandramani too had an analogous experience confirming the divine origin of the child. Gadādhar had a peculiar charm about him that made him the darling of the village. He displayed wonderful intelligence and memory. He learnt many hymns from the lips of the elders and mastered the mythological lore of his people. In play-acting he was a master. But he

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was very restless. To curb this, his father sent him to the village school, where he progressed fairly well, but showed a distaste for mathematics—calculation was not to be his way of life. As he grew older, the thought of the gods and goddesses of Hinduism threw him into deep meditation, so much so that he began to have trances. He made images and worshipped them as a pastime ; he enacted the mythological episodes with the help of his playmates and sang the praise of the deities with angelic sweetness. When Gadādhar was in the midst of such happy moods, his father died in 1843. It was a great shock to him, but it drew his mind further inward. Being the youngest child of the family, he got sufficient indulgence to grow up in his own way, which soon raised problems for all.

When Gadādhar was nine years old, he was invested with the sacred thread. After the ceremony he was expected to receive his first alms from a brahmin family. But the boy would have it from none other than Dhani, the blacksmith woman who tended him at birth, and whom he in consequence regarded as his mother. He had agreed to this request of hers, and would not go back upon his word. Finally, the family had to yield.

What concerned his guardians more was his proneness to solitary meditation, group singing and theatrical performances at a near-by mango grove, which were playing havoc with his studies. His eldest brother Rāmkumār had set up a Sanskrit school in Calcutta. He now asked Gadādhar to join it as a student and also add to the family income by helping him in priestly duties. Gadādhar went to Calcutta and began to worship at the houses of some neighbours, just because this offered him an opportunity to be nearer God. But when called upon to study, he said, "Brother, what shall I do with mere bread-winning education? I would

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rather acquire that wisdom which will illumine my heart and satisfy me for ever."

At this time the stage was being set for Shri Rāmakrishna's unique play in a strange way. Rāni Rāsmani, a rich, pious widow of Calcutta, erected, in obedience to a dream, a magnificent temple at Dakshineshwar, five miles to the north of that city, for the Divine Mother, Kāli, with other temples in honour of Shiva and Krishna. The temples were dedicated on May 31, 1855, and Rāmkumār came there as the priest of the Kāli temple. He wanted Shri Rāmakrishna also to take up some duty there ; but the latter stoutly refused, since the orthodox tradition of his family held it sacrilegious to have any connection with a temple dedicated by a Sudra. He, however, soon got over his scruples and began to live on the temple premises with his brother. In course of time, he was prevailed upon by the proprietors to accept service there as well. However, it was not monetary considerations, but the calm, serene atmosphere of the place that decided the matter for him. Here was a splendid opportunity for his spiritual exercises, and he grasped it eagerly. Rāmkumār heaved a sigh of relief to find his brother engaged in this promising work, but he died after only a year. This bereavement redoubled Shri Rāmakrishna's desire for God-realisation, for everything else now seemed to him to be hollow and frivolous. From now on he began to shun the company of people, and at dead of night he would enter the dense woodland in the northern part of the temple-garden, to sit there in meditation after removing his holy thread and everything as man-made distinctions that were obstacles to union with God. From there he returned unnoticed at day-break.

And as Shri Rāmakrishna began to scale the heights of spirituality, and as he became increasingly freed from conventional ideas of behaviour, he could no longer

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carry on formal worship. Mother Kāli was never to him a mere image. She was the veritable living Mother of the universe; and now he longed to be ever in Her loving presence. The delay in the revelation caused him agony. He cried, he implored, he writhed and rubbed his face on the ground like one in gripping pain. At last when he had reached the limit of human endurance, the veil lifted, and he had a beatific vision of the Divine Mother. About this first experience he said later, "I could not bear the separation any longer: life did not seem worth living. Suddenly my eyes fell on the sword that was kept in the Mother's temple. . . . I jumped up like a madman and seized it, when suddenly the blessed Mother revealed Herself to me, and I fell unconscious on the floor. Exactly what happened after that, or how that day or the next passed, I do not know; but within me there was a steady flow of undiluted bliss altogether new, and I felt the presence of the Mother."

From that day the Divine Mother never left him. She became a living presence to him. He saw Her moving about before his very eyes, and from Her he took his directions at every turn.

Then the desire came upon him to realise God in His various other aspects. So he adopted the attitude of the Monkey-god, Hanumān, towards Shri Rāma, and so great was the intensity of his self-identification as he loudly repeated the name of Rāma, that not only his movements were like those of Hanumān, but also certain physical characteristics of the latter appeared in him in a rudimentary form. At last he had vision of Shri Rāma. Again, while sitting in a vacant mood under a tree on the river, he saw in broad daylight Shri Sitā walking before him and then merging in him.

Such was his spontaneous spiritual fervour, such his informal but living contact with the Divine Presence

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in the temple, and such his physical torture resulting from no discernible cause! To the uninitiated it could mean only one thing—that he had gone mad! The rumour gradually spread to Kāmārpukur. His mother naturally became anxious and had him brought home for rest and treatment. There too Shri Rāmakrishna continued in secret his spiritual practices, although outwardly he was calm and collected. To complete this apparent cure, the family planned to tie him down to wedlock. But social restrictions stood in the way of their finding a suitable bride, till at last in 1859, at Shri Rāmakrishna's own suggestion, a marriage was arranged with Shri Sāradāmani Devi of Jayrāmbāti, then a mere child of slightly over five years, while Shri Rāmakrishna was twenty-three years of age. It was really a betrothal. After this, however, Shri Rāmakrishna's life ran its wonted course of divine fervour at Kāmārpukur for more than a year and a half, when he returned to Dakshineshwar to be virtually lost to the world again.

Up till now Shri Rāmakrishna had relied almost entirely on his own resources for God-realisation. From now on he received the unsought help of adepts. First, in 1861, came the Bhairavi Brāhmani, a nun of immense spiritual power from East Bengal, who guided the Master through an innumerable variety of occult Tāntrika practices, some of them most difficult ones, in all of which he attained success with ease by dint of his matchless purity, one-pointed zeal and entire dependence on the Mother. The Bhairavi marvelled at his extraordinary realisations, testified to by characteristic external signs, and openly declared him to be nothing less than an Incarnation of God. To prove this, she had an assembly of great religious leaders and scholars called at Dakshineshwar, to which she presented her case so ably, quoting scriptural texts in support

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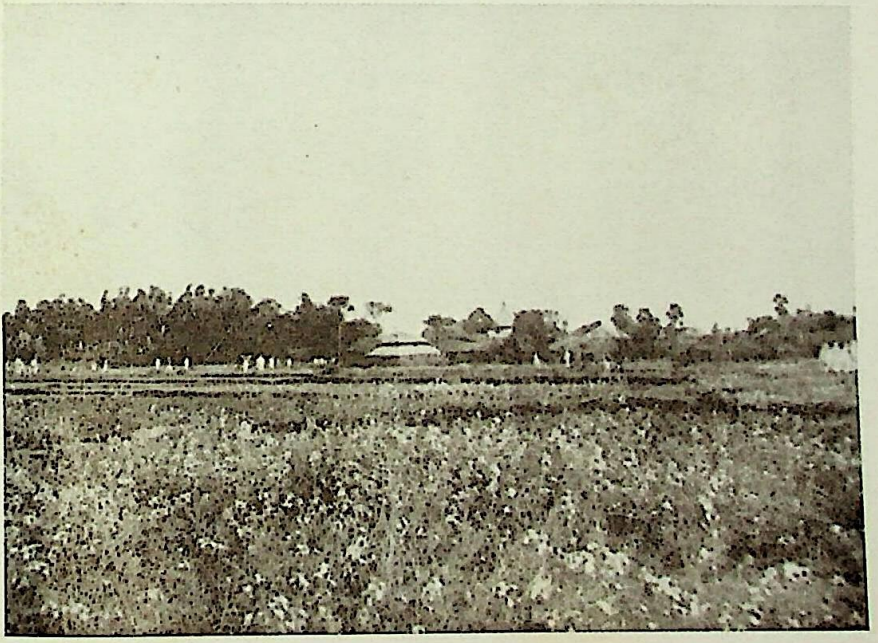
KĀMĀRPUKUR



JAYRĀMBĀTI

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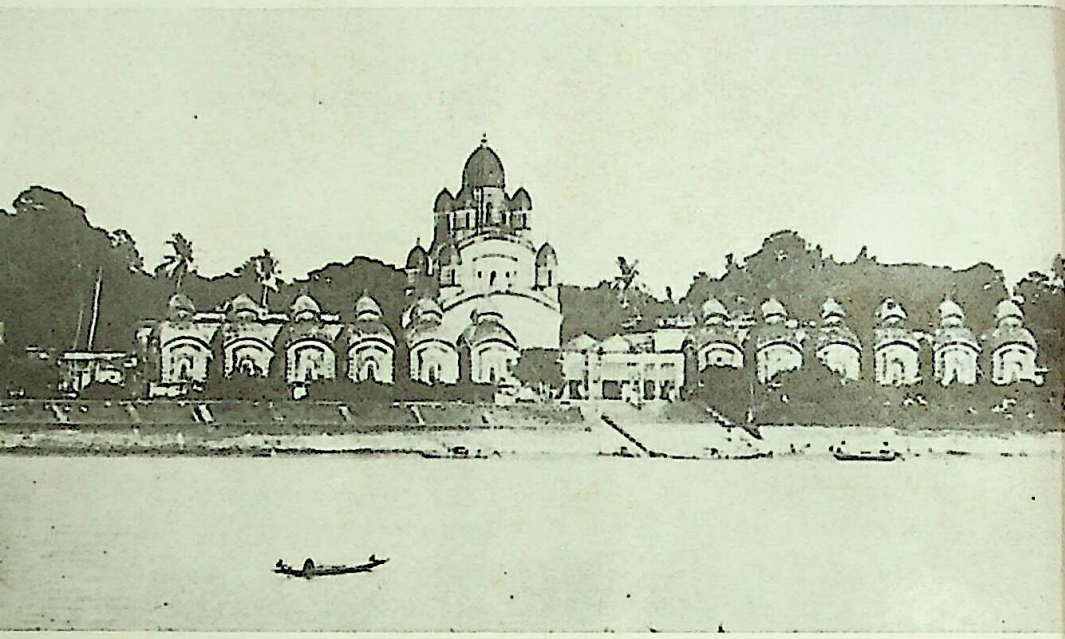

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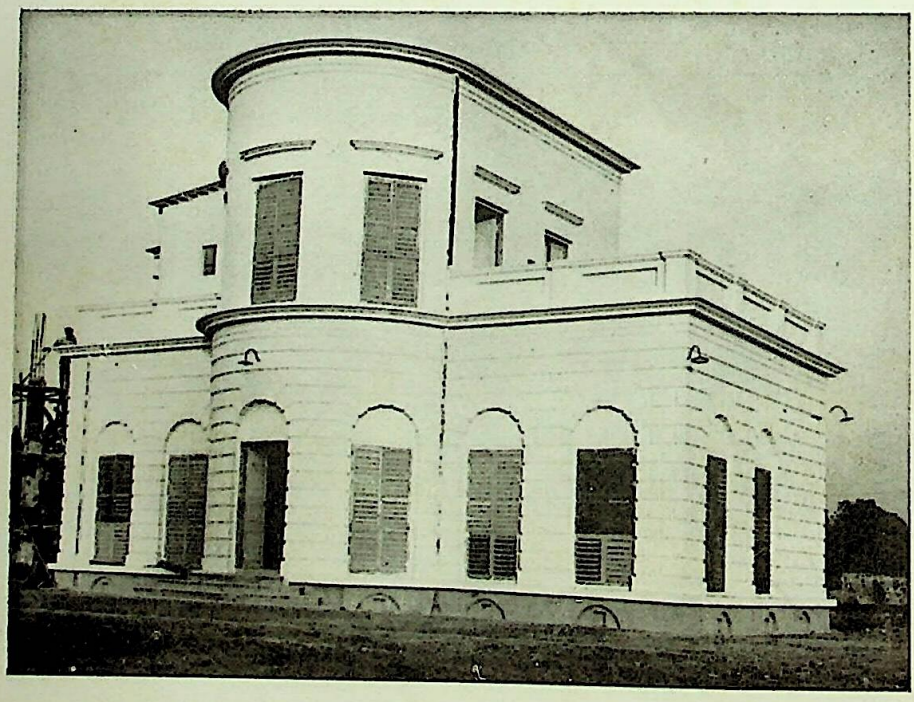

COSSIPORE GARDEN-HOUSE

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that she came out fully victorious. But the Master witnessed all this as if it concerned somebody else. Unruffled by this public recognition, he prepared to plunge again into other spiritual depths.

Soon came to him, in 1864, Jatādhāri, a mystic Vaishnava monk from Northern India, whose love and yearning for Rāmlālā, or the Child Rāma, infected him also. Under the monk's inspiration he made rapid progress and very soon realised God as the Child Rāma, who actually lived and moved with him. Shri Rāmakrishna caressed him, and sometimes also punished him when he was naughty, only to burst into tears of contrition the next moment.

A few months after that, Totā Puri came on the scene. He was a stern monk from the Punjab who had reached Nirvikalpa Samādhi, the highest stage in realisation, where multiplicity vanishes and the one Brahman alone subsists. Under the guidance of this great ascetic, Shri Rāmakrishna embraced the monastic life, and getting full instruction regarding the path of knowledge taught by Monism, he sat in meditation and, to the amazement of his guru, attained the Nirvikalpa Samādhi at one bound. It had taken Totā Puri forty years to do that!

One peculiarity of Shri Rāmakrishna was that even his teachers got their outlook widened and their visions clarified through him. This was specially the case with Totā Puri, who, like a staunch Vedāntist, denounced the world as something illusory. As a philosophy this is all right, and in the highest absorption or Samādhi it is a perceived truth. But none the less, the world has its relative, empirical value, and it is no use denying this, so long as one has the slightest physical consciousness. Rather one should look upon the universe as a manifestation of the inscrutable power of the Lord and establish a loving relationship with it. In keeping

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with his general attitude, Totā at first rejected Kāli; but he had to change his attitude. His long stay at Dakshineshwar out of love for Shri Rāmakrishna brought on him a bad type of dysentery that defied all treatment, till one night the saint, out of sheer disgust for the body, determined to get rid of it by drowning it in the Ganges. But strangely enough, the river in its entire width proved too shallow that night for his purpose. Foiled in his attempt, but illumined in mind, the saint returned to prostrate himself before the image of Kāli, and in his revised philosophy of life the emphasis shifted from a pointless theoretical negation to a fruitful practical affirmation—an outlook that was to bear fruit in the achievements of his grand-disciples. Soon after Totā left Dakshineshwar.

Shri Rāmakrishna now resolved to remain immersed in a state of absolute identity with Brahman, and he passed six months in this way without any consciousness of his body or his surroundings. At last he received the Mother's behest, "Remain on the threshold of relative consciousness for the sake of humanity." Then he was laid low with a severe attack of dysentery that persisted for six months and forced his mind to adjust itself to empirical realities at the same time that it remained soaked in God-consciousness.

By now Shri Rāmakrishna had tasted the bliss of God through the high roads of Hinduism. He had trodden the paths of devotion, yoga and knowledge, and he had reached the highest goals of Vaishnavism, Shāktaism and Vedāntism. But his mind still longed to enjoy the divine life of those outside the pale of Hinduism. About Buddha he said in later life: "I have heard much about Buddha. He is one of the ten Incarnations of God. Brahman is unmoving . . . Absolute Consciousness. When one's intellect merges in this, one attains the knowledge of Brahman and

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becomes *buddha,* enlightened" (*Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* May 24, 1884). And on another occasion when Narendra referred to the popular opinion that Buddha was an atheist, the Master said, "Why an atheist? He was not. Only he could not express in words what he felt. Do you know what *buddha* is? To be one with Absolute Consciousness by constantly reflecting on It. . . . Where one realises one's real nature, it is a state between existence and non-existence" (*ibid.,* April 9, 1886). So Buddha, according to him, is also a Vedāntin, but misunderstood by others.

Mohammed and Christ, however, belonged to a distinct category. Their religions now attracted him. He resolved to traverse those paths also. In 1866 he learnt the secrets of Sufism from one Govinda Rāy, then living at Dakshineshwar. Receiving initiation into the new faith, the Master repeated the name of Allah and recited the Namaz regularly with earnestness. During those days all Hindu ideas were banished from his mind ; he would not even salute the Hindu deities. He got his food prepared in the Mohammedan way by a Hindu cook, since he was not allowed to go farther than that in the temple premises. Through the intensity of his faith he reached the goal in three days. First he had the vision of a radiant Person with a long beard and a solemn countenance. Then his mind, passing through the realisation of Brahman with attributes, was finally absorbed in the Brahman without attributes.

It was eight years later, in 1874, that Shri Rāmakrishna set himself to explore the mysteries of Christianity. Shambhu Nāth Mallik, a devotee who had a garden-house at Dakshineshwar, used to explain the Bible to the Master whenever he went there. As a result, the Master felt a fascination for Christ and Christianity. Then one day, as he was sitting in the

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parlour of Jadulāl Mallik, another devotee, adjoining the Kāli temple, his eyes fell on a picture[1] of the Madonna. As the sight threw him into a meditative mood, the picture suddenly grew animated and effulgent. He felt that his Hindu ideas were being pushed aside. In this predicament he prayed to the Divine Mother, "What is it that Thou art doing to me, Mother?" But nothing availed, and before his eyes was opened the vision of a Christian church with devotees burning incense and lighting candles before Jesus. For three days, these ideas swayed his mind. On the fourth day, as he was pacing near the Panchavati grove at Dakshineshwar, he saw an extraordinary-looking person of serene aspect and foreign extraction approach gazing at him. Shri Rāmakrishna's heart spontaneously assured him that it was none other than Christ. The Son of Man then embraced him and merged in him, sending him into deep ecstasy.

All these experiences led Shri Rāmakrishna to a realisation of the harmony of all religions, which he declared afterwards as follows: "Different creeds are but different paths to reach the one God."

In our effort to present a connected picture of Shri Rāmakrishna's spiritual attainments, we have skipped over two important incidents which were of great significance for the future developments of the Order named after him. To these we now turn. The first occurred in 1868 during a pilgrimage to northern India in company with Mathurā Nāth Bishwās, the Master's staunch devotee, who was the proprietor of the temple-garden of Dakshineshwar. On their first halt at Deoghar, two hundred miles from Calcutta, the seat of an ancient temple of Shiva, called Vaidyanātha, Shri Rāmakrishna one day came across some famine-stricken villagers in

[1] This is now at the Hindu Temple, San Francisco, U.S.A.

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THE HOLY MOTHER
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an extremely wretched condition. Distressed at the sight, he said to Mathur, "You are the steward of the Mother. Feed these poor people and give each a piece of cloth." Mathur hesitated; for it meant a heavy demand on his purse, which would make the pilgrimage difficult. But the Master was adamant. Bathed in tears he blurted out, "Fie upon you! I am not going to Benares. I will stay with these helpless people," and like a petulant child he seated himself among the villagers. His compassion now moved Mathur, who ordered bales of cloth for them, and fed them to their hearts' content. One is reminded of a verse in the *Bhāgavata,* which says: "The one indwelling Self, residing in the hearts of all as their friend, is not so pleased by lavish offerings even when made by the gods, who are smitten with desires, as He is by that compassion for all beings which is beyond the reach of the wicked" (III. ix. 12).

Incidentally, some time in 1870-71, the Master insisted on similar service being done to the famine-stricken while he was on a visit to Mathur's estate in the Nadia district in his company.

The other important incident referred to above is the coming of Shri Sāradā Devi, Shri Rāmakrishna's partner in life, to Dakshineshwar in the beginning of 1872. Born at Jayrāmbāti, three miles from Kāmārpukur, on December 22, 1853, she had been married to the Master in the summer of 1859. As Shri Rāmakrishna seldom went to his native village, Sāradā Devi spent most of her days at Jayrāmbāti with her mother. As befitted the consort of a spiritual giant like Shri Rāmakrishna, Sāradā Devi, from her very childhood, had an intensely religious temperament. Now and then she had divine visions like her husband, and in compassion she could easily vie with him. But like all Hindu girls, she was very bashful, and though she longed to be at

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her husband's side, she could never utter a word about it, much less take any active step. Things, however, soon took a peculiar turn to force a decision on her. Shri Rāmakrishna's strange behaviour, culminating in his practice of Sufism, had again set people saying that he had lost his wits. This gossip travelled to Jayrāmbāti also, and its persistence induced Sāradā Devi to drop a hint to a friend that she would like to visit Dakshineshwar along with the party that was going for a dip in the holy Ganges on an auspicious day. She really wanted to reassure herself that nothing was wrong with her saintly husband, whom some years ago, at Kāmārpukur, she had found so loving and considerate, and also to be by his side for any needed service. Her father, when told of her wish, understood and took her personally to Dakshineshwar.

Shri Sāradā Devi was now eighteen years old, and it was only now that she realised the meaning of wifehood. With trepidation she entered the Master's room at Dakshineshwar. But Shri Rāmakrishna received her with great love, and even allowed her to share his bed. For had not his teacher Totā Puri told him that a man's knowleldge of Brahman could best be tested in the presence of his wife? But he had to be sure about his wife's attitude. So he asked her, "Well, my dear, have you come to drag me down to the worldly level?" Her prompt reply was, "Oh, no, . . . I have come to help you in your chosen path." On another day, while stroking his feet, she asked him, "How do you regard me?" And he replied, "The same Mother that is in the (Kāli) temple, gave birth to this body and now lives at the music tower, and she, again, is stroking my feet." Thus the two souls lived in holy companionship for some time, till on the new-moon night of June 5, 1872, he worshipped her formally as the Mother of the universe, and at the end of it offered the fruits of all his spiritual

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endeavours, as also his rosary, at her feet. Shri Sāradā Devi, whom we shall now refer to as the Holy Mother, as she came afterwards to be called, accepted all this adoration in a mood of divine absorption, and the Master too had entered deep Samādhi. The two souls now discovered a new meaning of their wedlock in a perpetual union on the spiritual plane, from which they never descended to the level of the flesh.

And yet their union on the human plane too found its consummation in a fuller sense of the term, opening the way for a greater manifestation of the divinity in man, for which purpose, indeed, both of them had come to this earth. That future history, however, remained as yet a sealed book to the people of that generation. Shri Rāmakrishna's mother-in-law Shyāmāsundari, for instance, regretted, "To what an eccentric son-in-law have I married my daughter! Alas, she has no family life, no child, and does not hear any one call her 'Mother'!" The Master one day heard this and said, "Dear mother-in-law, please don't worry over that. Your daughter, you will see later, will have so many children that she will be bewildered to hear the call of 'Mother'." The Holy Mother too, believing in her innocence her neighbours' remark that a childless woman's life was a curse, felt morose at times. Shri Rāmakrishna, who read her thoughts, once said to her by way of consolation, "Why do you worry? I shall leave you such jewels of children as one can hardly get even if one performs austerities by offering one's head. You will find later so many children calling you mother, that you will be unable to stand it." Shyāmāsundari lived to see this prophecy fulfilled. And Shri Sāradā Devi, her childless daughter, found herself soon installed as the Holy Mother in the hearts of hundreds of devoted children. Divine things shape themselves in strange ways, in regions beyond the human ken!

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With this passing glimpse of the background of this divine play, we can now resume the threads of the history of the formation of the Order. The disciples, all gathered at the Master's feet, were receiving the new message. Narendra Nāth was naturally picked up as the foremost of the group, for as we progress we shall find that he was blessed with a prodigious capacity not only for grasping the implications of the new message but also for translating them into action. Such a medium was absolutely necessary. For the rays of the sun course through millions of miles of empty space without producing any heat or light. It is only when they strike against the earth, moon, etc. that human beings receive heat and light and put them to proper use. Narendra was the best reflecting medium. It is the contact between these two souls that has endowed some of the transcendental utterances of Hinduism with an empirical meaning comprehensible to ordinary mortals.

And who was Narendra?

Narendra's father was Vishwanāth Datta, a rich and cultured attorney of Calcutta who profoundly influenced the intellectual life of his son. And his mother was Bhuvaneshwari Devi, a very pious and noble lady, in whose affectionate lap Narendra mastered the religious lore of his people. Born on January 12, 1863, Narendra grew up to be a precocious boy with many activities, in all of which he shone and easily gained the leadership of his compeers in that part of the city. When he went to bed at night, a bright ball would appear before his vision, which expanded and enveloped him till he fell asleep. He considered this just a normal phenomenon and never mentioned it to anybody. Only after his acquaintance with Shri Rāmakrishna did he learn that it betokened a past life of yogic practice. Even as a child he loved to play at meditation before little idols, and sat motionless for long periods. As he grew older, he

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became an adept, and spent hours in meditation. And once at least in his youth he had the vision of Buddha when fully awake. Before going to Dakshineshwar, he was attracted by Keshab Chandra Sen, to whose Brāhmo Samāj he frequently went, bringing his friends with him. He sang in a sweet baritone, and could play on various instruments with considerable skill. In athletics he outshone others, particularly in wrestling. In debate he was unchallengeable. His professors loved him and entertained great hopes for him. But he was bold to a fault, and some mistook this for intellectual and aristocratic arrogance. Yet he was very simple in his habits, careless about dress, warm in his friendship and unstinted in his charity.

Brave in action and thought as Narendra was in his youth, he was braver in his spiritual aspiration. He soon discovered that the social reforms, intellectual compromises with other systems and the apologetic acceptance of some of the national religious practices that formed the basis of most of the progressive movements of the day, could not satisfy the hunger of his soul, much less lead him to his goal of God-realisation; nay, such halting and dry intellectualism was not calculated even to remove one's legitimate doubts. The study of John Stuart Mill, Hume and Herbert Spencer raised a tumult of thoughts in him, till his harassing doubts turned into a settled scepticism. Still his inherent spiritual hankering would not allow him any respite. He had some love for the Brāhmo Samāj, and agreed with the Brāhmos in their denunciation of caste, polytheism, image worship, the institution of the guru and divine Incarnation, and their advocacy of freedom for women. But his soul craved for something more positive. In fact, he was then typical of Young Bengal, smarting under the onslaught of science, Christianity and Western institutions, and yet too captivated by them

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to eschew them wholly and take a firmer stand on national culture and belief. Moreover, Narendra's mind grappled with the problem, "Does God exist?" He asked all who were in a position to answer, "Sir, have you seen God?" But not one could satisfy this impetuous aspirant.

At last one day, towards the end of 1881, when Narendra had finished his First Arts Examination, he was persuaded by Rām Chandra Datta, who was a relative, and Surendra Nāth Mitra to visit Dakshineshwar. At the very first sight, Shri Rāmakrishna discovered in Narendra a spiritual giant, for no other could have eyes revealing such power of introspection and such indifference to his environment amidst the materialistic atmosphere of the city. He drew Narendra aside to the enclosed northern verandah of his room, and holding him by the hand, tearfully said, "Ah! you come so late! . . . My ears are almost burnt listening to the secular talks of worldly people." Thus he began to sob and added with folded hands, "Lord, I know you are that ancient sage, Nara, the Incarnation of Nārāyana, born on earth to remove the miseries of mankind."

Narendra was altogether taken aback and doubted the sanity of the Master. But as soon as Shri Rāmakrishna returned among the devotees, he seemed quite a normal man of genuine renunciation and divine fervour. So Narendra crept near him and put the question that agitated him: "Sir, have you seen God?" "Yes," was the instant reply, "I see Him just as I see you, only in a much intenser sense. God can be realised. One can see and talk with Him as I am doing with you." After the interview Narendra summed up his estimation of the Master thus: "Even if insane, this man is the holiest of the holy, a true saint, and for that alone he deserves the reverent homage of mankind."

The second meeting was more interesting. Shri

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Rāmakrishna affectionately seated Narendra by his side and quickly placed his right foot on the latter's body. Narendra described the subsequent experience thus: "With my eyes open, I saw the walls and everything in the room whirling rapidly away and vanishing into naught, and the whole universe, together with my individuality, was about to be engulfed in an all-embracing mysterious void." Unable to bear this, he cried out, "What is it that you are doing to me! I have my parents at home." The Master laughed out loud and said, "All right, let it rest now." And Narendra was himself again.

On the third visit Narendra made up his mind to resist this mysterious influence. That day the Master took him to the adjacent garden of Jadulāl Mallik and soon fell into a trance, touching Narendra so as to lift his mind to a higher plane where the secrets of his personality could be unravelled. About this the Master said later, "While he was in that state, I asked him about his antecedents and where he lived, his mission in this world and the duration of his mortal life. He dived deep into himself and gave fitting answers to my questions. These only confirmed what I had seen and inferred about him."

With this account of the first contacts we now turn to some of the ideas imbibed by the future Swāmi Vivekānanda. But while on this subject, we must remember the Master's own declaration that Narendra and a few others were Nityasiddha—perfect even from birth. "What training they go through," he used to say, "they do not need for themselves; it is for the good of the world." And if any one happened to make the slightest criticism of Narendra, he would say, "Let no one judge Naren. No one will ever be able to understand him fully." And he would warn the critic that he was committing sheer blasphemy. And how great

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was his appreciation of Narendra's worth! One day he said, "Well, if Keshab is possessed of one mark of greatness, Naren has eighteen such marks." To Narendra's vehement protest the Master only replied, "I cannot help it. . . . The Divine Mother showed me certain things which I simply repeated." Narendra still remained unconvinced.

The Master loved Narendra intensely and could not bear to be separated from him. On one occasion, when the Master was dragged by this love to meet him at a certain place of worship in Calcutta and subjected to ignominy, Narendra became furious and warned him that this kind of infatuation was dangerous for him. Shri Rāmakrishna, who believed in what fell from the lips of Narendra, became perturbed and approached the Mother of the universe for light. After getting Her response he said to Narendra, "You rogue, I will not listen to you any more. Mother says that I love you because I see the Lord in you; and the day I shall no longer do so, I shall not be able to bear even the sight of you." That was the Vedāntic philosophy of human relationship, which we shall see later in its full bloom in the Rāmakrishna movement. Here is how the Master expounded it:

One day, some time in 1884, the talk drifted to the Vaishnava tenet. In the course of it the Master said, "This religion enjoins upon its followers the practice of three things—delight in the name of God, compassion for all living creatures and service to the devotees of Vishnu." Hardly had he finished when he fell into a trance. Then in a semi-conscious mood he said to himself, "Compassion for creatures! Compassion for creatures! Thou fool! An insignificant worm crawling on the earth, thou to show compassion to others! Who art thou to show compassion? No, no, it is not compassion for others, but rather service to

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man, recognising him as the manifestation of God!" All heard this, but Narendra understood its implication. Outside the room he said to others, "What a strange light I have discovered in those wonderful words of the Master! How beautifully he has reconciled the ideal of Bhakti (devotion) with the knowledge of Vedānta (Monism)! I have understood from these words of wisdom that the ideal of Vedānta, lived by the recluse outside the pale of society, can be practised at home and applied to all our daily concerns. . . . It is He who has become all the different creatures—objects of our love; and yet He is beyond all these. Such realisation of Divinity in humanity leaves no room for egotism. . . . Service of man, knowing him to be the manifestation of God, purifies the heart, and such an aspirant quickly realises himself as part and parcel of God—Existence-Knowledge-Bliss. Well, if the Lord wills, the day will come when I shall proclaim this grand truth before the world at large. I shall make it the common property of all—the wise and the ignorant, the rich and the poor, the brahmin and the pariah."

Narendra, as Swāmi Vivekānanda, fulfilled his promise to the letter. He employed his oratory for propagating, from one end of the world to the other, his philosophy of practical Vedānta and oneness of humanity; he exercised his executive power for planning and moulding the Rāmakrishna Mission; and he gave the widest freedom to his muse to pen the following lines in Bengali:

Aye, born heir to the Infinite thou art,
Within thy heart is the ocean of Love,
Give, give away—whoever asks return,
His ocean dwindles down to a mere drop.

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From highest Brahman to the yonder worm,
And to the very minutest atom,
Everywhere is the same God, the All-Love;
Friend, offer mind, soul, body, at their feet.

These are His manifold forms before thee,
Rejecting them, where seekest thou for God?
Who loves all beings, without distinction,
He indeed is worshipping best his God.

(*Complete Works,* Vol. IV, p. 496.)

Yet Narendra did not arrive at this acceptance of practical Vedānta without demur. The Master wanted to instil into his mind the basic ideas of Monism, since these were palpable realities actualised in his own life. When somebody walked over grass, Shri Rāmakrishna felt as though the man were treading on his own chest. When two boatmen quarrelled and one slapped the other on the back, the pink finger marks became clearly visible on his own back, and he smarted under the pain. While moving through Calcutta, he saw all human beings as so many representations of Reality—no matter whether they were the scum of society or strangers standing under a tree. With Narendra, however, Monism was still an absurd intellectual theory. He resisted it and condemned it saying, "It is blasphemous, for there is no difference between such philosophy and atheism." On one occasion he ridiculed it: "How can this be? This jug is God, this cup is God, and we too are God: nothing can be more preposterous." Shri Rāmakrishna overheard him, and came on the scene in a semi-conscious state, calling out to Narendra, "Hullo, what are you talking about?" Then he smilingly touched Narendra and plunged into Samādhi. "The magic touch of the Master that day," recounted Narendra, "immediately

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brought a wonderful change over my mind. I was stupefied to find that really there was nothing in the universe but God! . . . I returned home, but there too everything I saw appeared to be Brahman." The world seemed to him unsubstantial, and he reacted to it by falling into a strange abstracted mood which alarmed his mother. He said, "This state of things continued for some days. . . . Thenceforth I could not deny the conclusions of the philosophy of Monism."

The Master was a strange prophet in whom all contradictions in religion as well as in all fields of human life became harmonised. And if Narendra had accepted Monism, he had again to be led to the other extreme of paying homage to images of God, despite all his Brāhmo prejudices. This came about through an ordeal even more agonising than what was needed in the case of the veteran Vedāntist Totā Puri. Narendra sat for his B.A. Examination in 1884, and soon after he was faced with the grim reality of the world. Before the result of the examination was out, his father died in the early part of the year. Vishwanāth Datta had earned much, but he had spent very liberally, so that after his death the family was in dire straits for mere food and clothing. To keep the wolf from the door, Narendra, the eldest son, went around the city offices looking for suitable employment, but without success. One who was to serve the poor in future, perhaps had need to drink from the bitter cup of abject penury. But at the time he could endure it no longer. In his extremity he approached Shri Rāmakrishna to intercede with the Divine Mother on his behalf. But the idea repelled the Master, who said, "My boy, I can't make such requests. But why don't you go and ask the Mother yourself? All your sufferings are due to your disregard of Her." So Narendra at last went to the Kāli temple, pros-

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trated himself before the image, and forgetting all about his mission, like a genuine spiritual aspirant, prayed, "Mother, give me discrimination! Give me renunciation! Grant unto me knowledge and devotion! Ordain that I may have an unimpeded vision of Thee!" On his return, the Master found out what had taken place, and sent him to the temple a second and a third time. But Narendra fared no better. His mind was too highly tuned to ask for such paltry things from the Mother of the universe, who was there to end all sense of want for ever. Then, understanding that it was the play of the Master, he implored him to do what was necessary. At last the Master said, "All right, your people at home will never be in want of plain food and clothing." That was reassuring for Narendra; but of greater significance to him was the new spiritual light that dawned upon him. The whole of that night he sang of the Mother, only to fall asleep exhausted in the morning. The Master was so happy that Naren had accepted the Divine Mother.

And why was this transformation of Narendra so important a fact to Shri Rāmakrishna? His would-be messengers could not move the world with a philosophy of mere negation. There must be some positive background somewhere; and that missing link was supplied by the Mother of the universe, who is considered to be the inscrutable Power of the transcendent Brahman, making possible Its immanence in the universe, even though It is one without a second and is devoid of any point of contact with anything. With this Divine Energy the successful saints of yore had always a relationship of heartfelt love and devotion, as is noted in the *Bhāgavata* (I. vii. 10): "Such is the charm of the Lord that even saints immersed in the bliss of the Self and free from bondage entertain selfless devotion for Him." The fact is, the workaday life

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cannot be built upon a purely transcendental conception; and for emancipated souls too, a positive relationship with the immanent aspect of the Deity becomes a logical desideratum. So along with the ideas of transcendence, the Master wanted Narendra to imbibe bold, positive ideas of God's immanence to make practical life possible. He once asked him, "Suppose, my boy, there is a vessel with a wide mouth containing syrup, and suppose you are a fly wishing to drink it, how would you do so?" Narendra replied that he would sit on the edge and sip, so that he might not get drowned. "You forget, my boy," the Master corrected him, "this is the ocean of Immortality." Narendra's was not to be any crass, misinterpreted philosophy of escapism or world-negation.

And yet Shri Rāmakrishna was a strong advocate of renunciation, nay he was renunciation incarnate. The essence of the *Gitā,* according to him, was detachment from everything. In later life he could not touch metal, and even unconscious contact produced shooting pain in his nerves. As we have seen, he worshipped his own consort, the Holy Mother, as the Mother of the universe. And when his young disciples were alone, he inspired them to renunciation; behind closed doors he pointed out to them the frailties of the world. When Niranjan was forced to take a clerk's job to maintain his mother, the Master said, "Were it not for the sake of your mother, I could not bear to look at your face after what you have done." Whenever a promising young man came to him, one of his first questions was, "Are you married?" And great was his disappointment if the answer was "yes." To Sharat and Shashi he pointed out St. Paul's observations on marriage from the Bible. This denial of the worldly life seemed to be contradictory to his general positive approach. But it was not really so. In his view, one had to give

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up lower things in order to attain the higher values of life; the call from above naturally forces one to overcome the pull from below. In fact, his renunciation was synonymous with a greater achievement, in which the rejected thing was also found ultimately to attain its fulfilment. When Hari (Swāmi Turiyānanda) asked, "How can passion be eliminated," his reply was, "Why should it be eliminated? Give it a new turn." That is to say, it should be directed towards God. That was his approach to life's problems, which necessarily involved both the positive and the negative, but the emphasis always lay on the former. In practical life it meant a world of difference.

Let us take two examples. One day, when the discussion turned to the need of celibacy, Hari said with an air of bravado, "Oh, I hate women, I cannot even bear their presence." Instead of encouraging him, the Master came out with the sharp rebuke, "How foolish! What do you mean by hating women? They are the representations of the Mother of the universe. You should look upon them as your mother and honour them. This is the only way of being saved from their malign influence. On the other hand, the more you hate them, the greater is the risk of your falling into their snare." This was something different from the common method of preserving sex purity by merely keeping at a distance.

And when a lady devotee confessed that she could not concentrate on God since somebody's face always cropped up in her mind, "Whose face is it?" inquired the Master with sympathy. The lady told him that it was her little nephew's. "Then think of the boy as the Child Krishna," was the corrective he suggested, and it had the desired effect.

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INCEPTION

(1886—1887)

Narendra and other young aspirants were being thus gradually led to the higher reaches of spirituality by acquiring a new outlook on life, when the Master fell seriously ill, which necessitated his removal to Calcutta. This apparently meant a break in the course of the disciples' training. But subsequent events showed that it was only an incentive to a more intensive preparation. The Master was first taken in the first half of October, 1885 to 55 Shyāmpukur Street, Calcutta, where he lived for about two and a half months. Then he was removed on December 11 to 90 Cossipore Road, in the northern outskirts of the city on the way to Dakshineshwar. At both these places, especially the latter, the young disciples gathered to serve him and thereby to be fused into a brotherhood. The Ramakrishna Math really started at the Cossipore garden-house, as Swāmi Vivekānanda wrote in 1897, "All our associations centre round that garden. In reality that was our first Math" (*Complete Works,* VIII, p. 411).

The house at Shyāmpukur was small. For this and other reasons only a few young men, viz., Kāli, Lātu and Shashi, could live there all the time. Others came and worked in the day-time, staying longer when it was possible or a need arose. And there was also the Holy Mother to prepare the Master's diet and cook for all. She who was in future years to exert her silent influence of unquestioning motherly affection which welded the monks together into a permanent brotherly organisation, began to come to the fore from the very

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day she came there. Her unique position had been recognised even during her stay at Dakshineshwar, where on account of her shyness she mostly kept indoors. Only Lātu, Jogin, and Gopāl Senior could approach her; even with the last two she rarely had direct talk. But Shyāmpukur altered the situation, bringing her closer to her sons. And when the Master moved to the more commodious building at Cossipore, and almost all the future monks gathered round to attend on him, the Holy Mother had naturally to take up a greater measure of silent leadership, the active guidance being entrusted to Narendra.

A few incidents at Cossipore deserve special mention because they throw light on this history. From time to time the Master had made such cryptic utterances as, "I shall make the whole thing public before I go," "When people in large numbers will begin to whisper about the greatness of this body, then the Mother will take it back," "The devotees will be sifted into inner and outer circles towards the end." The time was fast approaching for those prophecies to be fulfilled.

At the Master's suggestion, Surendra Nāth Mitra took the Cossipore garden-house on lease in his own name, paying eighty rupees per month. Besides, he defrayed the major portion of the total expenses, which ran up to more than two hundred rupees a month, inclusive of the rent. Other devotees, among whom may be mentioned Balarām Bose, Mahendra Nāth Gupta, Rām Chandra Datta, Girish Chandra Ghosh and Mano Mohan Mitra, made up the balance. And the younger devotees gradually swelled in number, till there were in constant attendance Narendra, Rākhāl, Bāburām, Niranjan, Jogindra, Tārak, Lātu, Gopāl Senior, Kāli, Shashi, Sharat and Gopāl Junior. Sāradā, Hari and Gangādhar could not stay because of pressure at home; but they came frequently to see the Master,

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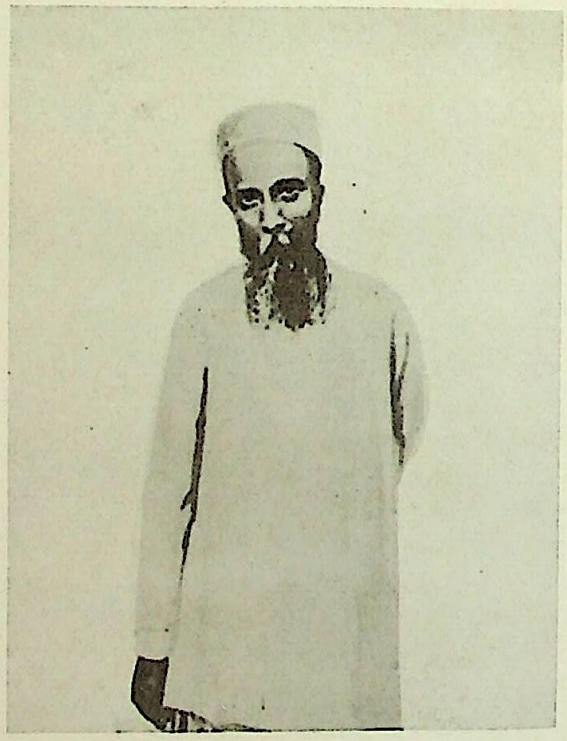

BALARĀM BOSE
(1842—1890)

SURENDRA NĀTH MITRA
(*C.* 1850—1890)

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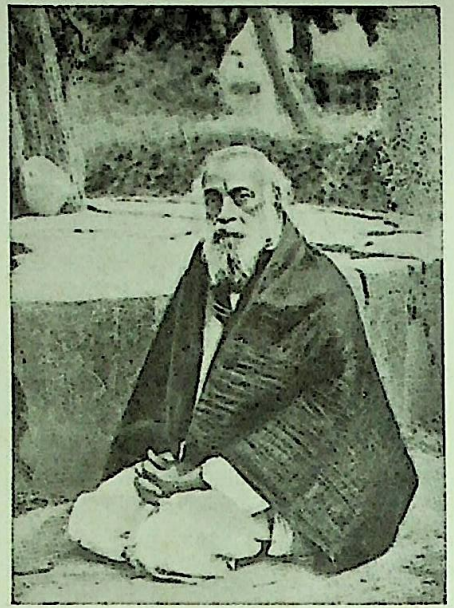
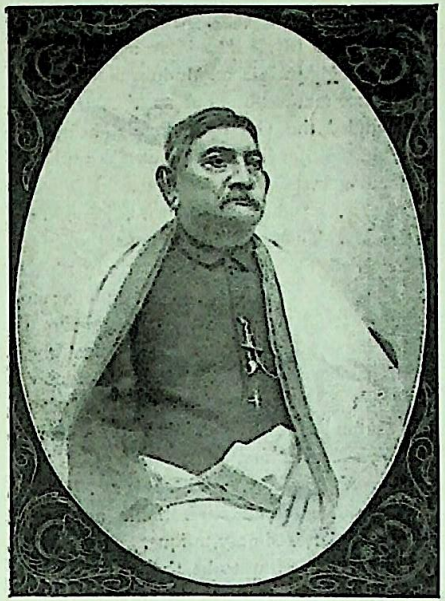


MAHENDRA NĀTH GUPTA
(1854—1932)



GIRISH CHANDRA GHOSH
(1844—1912)

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who now addressed himself to giving shape to his plan. He selected two persons in particular, the Holy Mother and Narendra, to carry it out after he was gone. As for the Holy Mother, even during the Dakshineshwar and Shyāmpukur days, the Master had been at pains to make the devotees recognise her greatness, and to induce her to accept her high destiny willingly and cheerfully. Young boys, in particular, would be placed under her care, and the women devotees would find in her a ready helper in all spheres of life. At Cossipore he made this most explicit. One day the Holy Mother noticed the Master looking at her wistfully for a long time, as though hesitating to say something important. "Why don't you speak it out?" she asked at last. The Master replied in an aggrieved tone, "Well, my dear, won't you do something? Must this (pointing to his own body) do everything single-handed?" "I am a woman," replied the Mother, "what can I do?" "No, no," said the Master, "you will have to do a great deal." Similar suggestions were made off and on. In addition, he taught her many Mantras or sacred formulae, to be given to various grades of spiritual aspirants. He told her of the spiritual poverty of the people of Calcutta, who had to be helped out of the morass of materialism. He communicated to her his vision of future disciples in other lands. He was never tired of hinting that a great future awaited her, and that she was divine. She heard it all; but she was too modest to accept those ideas outright. All the same, the Master declared at times to his disciples that she was none other than Sāradā, Saraswati, the goddess of learning, come down to impart true knowledge, and she was his counterpart as regards divine energy, meaning perhaps that ethereal love without reservations which makes life worth living on this miserable earth, and that quiet spiritual vigour which makes human progress possible.

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Narendra knew from the very beginning of the illness, that the Master was preparing to depart, and that Cossipore offered them the last and best opportunity for individual and collective spiritual advance under the Master's very eyes. One night, when walking in the garden, he told Sharat, Gopāl Junior and a few others, "The Master's disease is most severe. May it not be that he intends to lay down his body! Strive your best for spiritual uplift through service to him and prayer and meditation, while yet there is time. After his passing away, there will be no end to your regrets. We are wasting our time in the foolish thought that we shall pray to God after finishing this or that business at hand. That is only fastening more chains of desire upon ourselves, and desire means death. We must root it out at once." Naren knew how to speak, and he meant what he said. And such exhortation did not fall on deaf ears. So the Cossipore days of the young men became packed with constant service in an intense spiritual atmosphere. Along with all this they continued to study philosophy and religion. The garden-house became a temple and a university in one.

Sometimes Narendra spent the whole night pacing restlessly, crying "Rāma," "Rāma," and sometimes he sat in meditation by a fire in the open air, when he felt his Kundalini (the "coiled-up" energy) roused and mystic powers astir within. Still he pined for the vision of the Absolute and importuned the Master to grant it to him. One day he said to him, "I want to remain merged in Samādhi for five or six days at a time, like Shukadeva of old, coming out of that state now and then merely for food to preserve the body, and then to be lost to the world again." "Fie on you!" replied the Master, "you are such a highly qualified aspirant, and you speak like this! I took you to be a huge banyan-tree under which thousands would find shelter, and here you are craving

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for personal emancipation!" Narendra winced at this just rebuke. But very soon he had his wish fulfilled. One evening he had the Nirvikalpa Samādhi, the highest state of absorption in the Absolute, and lost all consciousness of the body. In alarm Gopāl Senior ran upstairs to inform the Master, who simply said, "Good. Let him remain in that state for some time. He has teased me long enough for this." When Narendra came back to normal and saw the Master, the latter said, "Now the Mother has shown you everything. But this realisation of yours shall remain locked up, and the key shall be with me. You have work to do. When you have finished that, it will be unlocked for you." Afterwards he said to the other disciples, "Naren will pass away only when he wills. The moment he realises who he is, he will refuse to stay any longer in the body."

Under the Master's guidance, the Holy Mother's loving care and Narendra's encouragement, the young men lived as a happy family, though the Master was sinking daily. None of them had any direct contact with the world in a real sense. Providence now wanted them to have a foretaste of the monastic life, which depends on others' charity. It was natural for these inexperienced youths, occupied in serving the Master and performing spiritual practice for their personal growth, to be careless about keeping accounts. But when the monthly bills began to mount, some devotees led by Rām Chandra Datta demanded a clear accounting. When one was submitted, it did not satisfy them. There was a discrepancy of a farthing or so ; this led to a storm in a teacup. The Master sensed the trouble from the looks of the young men, and firmly forbade them to accept money any more under such conditions. He would rather live wherever Narendra and the rest would take him, remaining satisfied with what they got by begging. On second thoughts, however, he wanted to

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consult some other devotees, and first of all Girish Chandra Ghosh. When Girish heard the story, he took the account book in his hand, tore it to pieces and promised to meet all the expenses single-handed, even if that meant the selling of his ancestral home to the last brick. When things took this turn, Rām Chandra and his friends realised their mistake, and the storm subsided. This petty incident was soon forgotten; but it left a sweet memory of the Master's willingness to stand by the boys through thick and thin.

When Shri Rāmakrishna felt that he had not many days left, he summoned Narendra to his presence and said, "I leave these boys to your care. See that they practise spiritual exercises even after my passing away, and that they do not return home." Another day, as a preparation for the life of renunciation that he foresaw for them, he sent them to beg their food from door to door regardless of the taunts and jeers that it might bring them. The food thus collected was cooked for the midday meal. The Master took a grain of it, remarking by way of encouragement, "Well done! This food is very pure."

Another day, the conversation drifted to the subject of renunciation. The Master said, "Lust and greed are ignorance. Knowledge, renunciation and devotion—these are the glories of illumination. Even after realisation some retain the illumined ego—to teach mankind and to taste the bliss of devotion and the association with devotees." When Narendra complained, "Some get cross with me when I advocate renunciation," Shri Rāmakrishna said, "One must renounce. . . . When you see everything saturated with That, can you see anything else—family or the like?"

And then came the day of dedication. In January, 1886, Gopāl Senior, who had returned from a pilgrimage, wanted to present ochre cloth and rosaries of

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Rudrāksha beads to some monks passing through Calcutta. But the Master said pointing to Narendra and others, "Here are boys full of renunciation. You won't find better monks anywhere. Distribute the cloths and rosaries among them." Gopāl had twelve pieces of cloth and as many rosaries, which he handed over to the Master. One evening the Master called the boys, the future apostles of the Rāmakrishna Order, put them through a certain ceremony, gave the pieces of cloth and rosaries to them and declared that thereafter they could take food from all, irrespective of caste and creed. The fortunate ones that day were Narendra, Rākhāl, Jogindra, Bāburām, Niranjan, Tārak, Sharat, Shashi, Gopāl Senior, Kāli and Lātu. The twelfth piece was reserved for Girish Chandra Ghosh. On another occasion the Master said to Narendra, "My yogic powers will manifest through you in time." He had already made his choice and had now only to finish his task quickly. For this purpose he would call Narendra every evening to his room and instruct him about how to keep the other young disciples together and train them for their destined life of renunciation.

The year 1886 advanced apace, bringing the day of final separation nearer and nearer. Only a few days were left. The Master suffered exceeding agony and could hardly speak. He called Narendra to his side and wrote on a piece of paper, "Naren will teach others." Narendra protested, "I won't do that." But the Master replied, "You must."

Three or four days before the final departure, the Master called Narendra to his presence, and fixing his gaze on him fell into a trance. Narendra felt as though something like an electric current was flowing into him, and lost outer consciousness. When he came to, he found the Master weeping. On being asked the reason for this, the Master said, "O Naren, today I have given

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you my all and have become a pauper! Through this power you will do great things, and only after that will you return to where you came from."

A couple of days before the end, a curious thought flashed across Narendra's mind as he stood at the Master's bed-side, "He has said many times that he is an Incarnation of God. If he can say it now in the throes of death, then I will believe him!" Instantly the Master turned to him and summoning all his energy said distinctly, "O my Naren, are you still not convinced? He who was Rāma and Krishna is now Rāmakrishna—but not in your Vedāntic sense!"

The curtain fell at two minutes past one in the early hours of August 16, 1886, and all hearts were enveloped in unutterable gloom. Next day, in the evening, the sacred body was consigned to the fire at the cremation ground by the Ganges at Cossipore. Then the ashes were gathered and carried to the garden-house in a copper vessel, to be deposited there on the Master's bed for regular worship. Shri Rāmakrishna could have no death ; he only discarded his mortal frame to be accessible to all in a more real sense for all time to come, and the ashes and the things used by him were to remain as mementos of that everlasting presence. He himself provided proofs of this. On that day the Holy Mother, following custom, sat down in the evening to remove her ornaments one by one as a mark of her widowhood. But the Master appeared in a vision just as he had been before his illness, caught hold of her hand and said, "Have I died that you are removing the signs of a married woman from your wrists?" So she desisted from removing the bracelets. A similar vision was granted to Narendra and another disciple, Harish. A week after the passing away, they were standing near the pond in front of the Cossipore house at about eight o'clock in the evening, sad at heart over their irreparable

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loss, when suddenly Narendra saw a shining draped form slowly approaching them along the drive from the gate. "Could it be the Master?" he thought, but kept quiet, fearing that it might be an hallucination. But his companion said in a hoarse whisper, "What is that?" So Naren called out, "Who is there?" At the cry others rushed out to see what the matter was. But the luminous form vanished after approaching a jasmine bush within ten yards of Narendra and Harish. The event left a deep impression on Narendra. He was convinced that the Master was still with them.

But trouble was brewing in another quarter. It came to a head scarcely three days after the passing. The lease for the garden would expire on August 31, and the devotees, headed by Rām Chandra, had no mind to extend it. According to them, the young men had nothing further to do. Their presence—particularly Narendra's, in the straitened circumstances of his family —was needed at home. So they were advised to leave Cossipore and resume their studies or other duties. The Holy Mother could go out on a pilgrimage to assuage her grief. As for the urn containing the Master's ashes, it could be deposited in the garden-house at Kānkurgāchhi, a solitary village in the eastern outskirts of Calcutta, where, at the Master's suggestion, Rām Chandra had established a retreat for meditation or congregational music. The Master had visited the retreat on December 26, 1883. The place having a sentimental appeal, most of the elderly devotees backed this last proposal. Against this was the consideration that the Master always liked the bank of the Ganges. Furthermore, some of the young men had virtually cut off all family ties and had now no place to go to. For them too a shelter had to be provided. But they had no money, and their wild dreams had very little support. The position at the time was described in

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a letter written in 1895 by Swāmi Vivekānanda to Swāmi Brahmānanda (Rākhāl), in which he says, "Rākhāl, you may remember that after the passing away of the Master, all pooh-poohed us as good-for-nothing fellows, except Balarām, Surendra, Mahendra, and Chuni—who were our friends in need" (*Complete Works,* VI, p. 343). Surendra's offer of help came a few weeks later. During the critical weeks we are discussing, that help was nowhere in sight. As for the other sympathisers, they were not in a position to undertake any heavy financial responsibility ; they could just offer trifling amounts to tide over temporary difficulties.

This was the situation as it appeared on the surface. But much more deep-rooted were the ideological differences that determined the attitudes of the two groups. Rām Chandra and others did not lend any credence to the assertion that Shri Rāmakrishna had wanted to create an Order of monks, or that he had given any one the ochre robe. They in their naïveté argued that if such an idea had been in the Master's mind, intimate followers like Rām Chandra would have known it first. The fact, however, was that Rām Chandra had not seen the whole of the Master, though he believed he had. And this was because of the Master's distinctive method of training, in which each person was led to the goal of final beatitude according to his individual capacity, and nothing was done to impair his faith in the path he was treading. Hence the Master avoided extolling the glory of monasticism in the presence of all and sundry. Such special instruction he communicated to the select few in secret.

It was no wonder, therefore, that the devotees in general had no clear idea of what was taking shape inside the rooms at Dakshineshwar and Cossipore. That was one of the mental obstacles which prevented them from understanding the Master. There was also

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another: Before coming in touch with the Master, they had lived under certain social conditions and thus acquired some deep-seated convictions, which influenced their attitude toward the new movement. They could not whole-heartedly accept the idea that the Master's message could be most effectively preached and put into action by an army of monks—since monks alone are capable of sustained and completely self-dedicated effort. To the credit of Rām Chandra and his friends it must be said, however, that they too, in their own way, were sufficiently inspired by the Master to undertake, even during his lifetime, public lectures, musical processions and the publication of books and magazines to present the new ideas as they understood them. Rām Chandra, Mano Mohan and Suresh Chandra Datta were the pioneers in the field. But all the same, they ridiculed the ideas of Narendra and others. Recalling those days, Swāmi Vivekānanda said later, "Who would sympathise with the imaginations of a boy? Imaginations that caused so much suffering to others (meaning his family)! Who would sympathise with me? None—except one. That one's sympathy brought blessing and hope. She was a woman . . . that lady, his wife, was the only one who sympathised with the idea of those boys. But she was powerless. She was poorer than we were. Never mind! We plunged into the breach. I believed as I was living that these ideas were going to rationalise India and bring better days to many lands and foreign races. With that belief came the realisation that it was better that a few persons suffered than that such ideas should die out of the world. What if a mother or two brothers die? It is a sacrifice. Let it be done. No great thing can be done without sacrifice. The heart must be plucked out and the bleeding heart placed upon the altar. Then great

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things are done. Is there any other way? None have found it" (*My Life and Mission,* pp. 15-17).

That was the spirit that sustained these fiery souls in those days of desolation. But Rām Chandra and the others saw no rosy picture of future possibilities; they saw the helplessness of the youths in the living present. They demanded the Master's ashes from the boys at Cossipore, and Narendra was willing to oblige them. But Shashi and Niranjan secretly arranged to transfer the bulk of the ashes into a new vessel, and had it removed to Balarām Bose's house in Calcutta along with some articles used by the Master. (Swāmi Sāradānanda in the *Udbodhan,* Vol. XVII, p. 440). The old vessel was then handed over to the unsuspecting Rām Chandra, who carried it home and from there to Kānkurgāchhi, on August 23, in a procession in which the young monks also joined heartily, Shashi carrying the urn on his head. It was the birthday of Shri Krishna, and on that auspicious day the holy urn was interred there. Long after, when the proposal for erecting a temple on the spot matured, all the devotees signed a pledge not to remove the ashes in future. So the temple rose, and the site became converted into a place of worship.

Meanwhile, the budding monastery at Cossipore got uprooted. The Holy Mother went to the house of Balarām Bose on August 21, preparatory to her departure for Vrindāban on August 30, along with Jogindra, Kāli, Lātu and some women disciples of the Master. Tārak too followed them. Rākhāl went to Balarām's house, while the others returned home, much against their will.

The Master was no longer on this earth in his physical body. The monastic Order he had planned to found had apparently been nipped in the bud, and the youths scattered to different parts of North India. The

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future looked gloomy so far as their organised monastic life was concerned. But unseen hands were working on a subtler plane. One evening, when Surendra Nāth Mitra was in his shrine, Shri Rāmakrishna appeared to him in a vision and said, "What are you doing? My boys are roaming about without a shelter. First find some remedy for that." This excited Surendra, who rushed at once to the house of Narendra, not far off, and said, "Brother, fix an abode where the Master's picture and ashes and the objects of his daily use can be kept and worshipped regularly, and where the all-renouncing devotees like you can live together in amity. We shall go there at times to get spiritual solace." Needless to say that Narendra jumped at the idea. He started at once in search of a house, and wrote to Tārak, at Vrindāban, to keep himself ready to return at a moment's notice. Tārak complied and came down to Benares to wait for the next instructions from the leader. Narendra ransacked the suburbs of Calcutta for a house on easy terms, for he had not much money to spare. Surendra had promised to pay monthly up to the amount he used to spend at the Cossipore garden. It might come up to one hundred rupees per month at most, and that was all that could be relied on for the time being. With this paltry sum to fall back upon, Narendra at last chose a dilapidated house, near the Ganges, at Barnagore, a little way above Cossipore, which once belonged to the Munshis of Tāki. The rent was fixed at eleven rupees monthly, and six rupees went to the cook ; the other expenses were for the plainest food and clothing. Surendra contributed thirty rupees a month for a few months ; then, as the inmates increased, he doubled and trebled the amount, till ultimately it went up to his promised one hundred rupees.

After the house had been secured, Gopāl Junior

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brought there the Master's bed and other articles used by him. It must have been in the latter part of September, 1886. The brahmin cook who had worked at the Cossipore garden took up his duties here. Sharat spent the night there, but as he had not yet renounced home, nor given up his studies at the Medical College, he could not be a permanent member. Gopāl Senior, a widower and the oldest monastic disciple of the Master, had no home to call his own, and had already been fired with the spirit of renunciation. So he seems to have become the first permanent inmate of the new monastery just after its starting. In the meantime, Tārak was asked to come from Benares, which he did without loss of time. His wife had died childless even during the Master's stay at Dakshineshwar. So Tārak, freed from worldly trammels, had left home for good with his father's blessings and the Master's approval. After embracing the monastic life, he lived apart for a while at Rām Chandra's house in Calcutta, and then at the latter's Kānkurgāchhi garden. Thus he too was eminently fitted to be among the earliest inmates of the monastery. Besides, he had the advantage of being older than all the rest who eventually joined, except Gopāl Senior. None of them ever minded the shabbiness of the house or the extremely poor standard of living. The starting of the first monastery of Shri Rāmakrishna was too epoch-making an event in their lives to allow them to notice such trivialities.

And what a house it was! To translate from the Bengali memoirs of Swāmi Virajānanda, who came there about 1891, "The Math was located in the upper storey of the back (i.e. western) portion of the dilapidated and neglected temple precincts of the Munshis of Tāki on the Prāmānik Ghat Road at Barnagore. As one entered through a door from the road and crossed a small open space, one came to a staircase leading up

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to a verandah with pillars and wooden railings, on the right side of which in the front portion was a big room that was under lease when I came, but which remained vacant ever after. The inner portion, used for the Math, could not be seen from the outside; it was desolate. The house no longer exists. . . . Behind that was a kitchen garden, [a pond], as also a Sajnā, a Bel, a mango and some cocoanut trees. The garden had not many vegetables to boast of. . . . The inner portion of the ground floor was full of the dirt of ages and so covered with weeds that it became the resort of snakes and jackals. Nobody approached the house. It was regarded as haunted, and nobody cared to take it on lease. . . . It was rumoured that many murders had been committed there in the olden days. . . . Ascending the staircase, one saw on his left the room of Kāli the ascetic. . . . Beyond that . . . was a room where the offerings for worship were prepared, and this led to the shrine room. Proceeding ahead . . . one came to a hall on the left, called the hall of the Dānās (or demons); beyond that was the dining-room and the bathroom, . . . On the walls of the hall hung the pictures of many gods and goddesses, and Divine Incarnations including crucified Christ. . . . At one side of the hall, on a portion of a wooden bedstead lay stacked some Bengali, Sanskrit and English books; the remaining portion was occupied by some musical instruments, and on the wall near by hung a Tānpurā (a stringed instrument). This hall served as the bedroom of the monks as well as a parlour to receive visitors and devotees. In fact, it was a multi-purpose hall. As for beds, there were some mats, arranged in rows, with a small pillow on each. For the visitors there were a few similar beds elsewhere. All sat on the floor. In the centre of the shrine room, a picture of the Master was placed on a bed arranged on the floor with a

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mat, a matress and pillows. At the foot of this bed, on a low stool were kept the urn with ashes of the Master and his slippers, before which Shashi Mahārāj performed the daily worship" (quoted in *Atiter Smriti*, pp. 35-37).

The Gospel of Sri Rāmakrishna (p. 984) presents yet another pen-picture of that weird house to which reference may be made. About the cultural and spiritual life the writer remarks in brief: "Narendra and other members of the Math often spent their evenings on this roof. There they devoted a great deal of time to discussion of the teachings of Shri Rāmakrishna, Shankarāchārya, Rāmānuja and Jesus Christ, and of Hindu philosophy, European philosophy, the Vedas, Purānas and the Tantras. Narendra, who had a beautiful voice, used to sing in the room of the Dānās and teach music to Sharat and a few others. Kāli used to take lessons on the instruments. Many, many happy hours they spent together in that hall, dancing and singing" (*ibid.* p. 985). These lines referred to May 7, 1887. We have still to deal with the intermediate months.

In a sense, the Rāmakrishna monastery was a strange innovation in Bengal. For though Bengal had her Vaishnava monks and nuns, who were generally illiterate and lived in isolation by begging, or in monasteries attached to temples from which they got their shares of offered food, and though she saw the monks of other orders from Upper India walking her roads on their pilgrimage to Gangāsāgar, Puri and other places, she had yet to see educated young men of cultured families living together in a wretched house with the Monistic philosophy as their main belief, while adopting for practical purposes devotion, meditation and other forms of spiritual discipline. There was also neither rhyme nor reason for setting up a new

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Incarnation in the person of Shri Rāmakrishna. Were not the familiar Incarnations good enough in their variety of appeal to pick and choose from? Moreover, there was an outlandish air about these young men. The Vaishnava monks wore short white cloth. The up-country Nāgā monks had their matted hair, went about almost naked and did not care for any shelter. But these fellows wore ochre clothes of full width and, compared with the common run of monks, they seemed to be living in luxury in spite of all the dirt and dreariness around them. And to change family names in order to wipe out all links with the past was something socially objectionable. All things combined, the new movement seemed to be crazy and beyond the grasp of the common people. It was no easy task to build up a monastery and a monastic life in the midst of so much unenlightened apathy and prejudice. And to crown all this, almost every one of the young men had his own peculiar difficulties at home, against which he had to struggle to free himself in order to join the Barnagore monastery.

Narendra's problem was the most baffling; he was, as it were, between two fires. As the leader of the monks, it behoved him to cut off family ties without any hesitation; but he could not do so, however much he would have liked it. The responsibility of organising the brotherhood had been placed squarely on him by the Master. But he could not extricate himself just then from obligations to his starving family and the legal complications in which he had got involved towards the end of the Master's lifetime. In spite of this, he undertook both his tasks with a set determination. Slowly but surely, he diverted his time and attention more and more to the monastery, appearing in Calcutta only when the occasion demanded it, and spending the

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rest of the days, and invariably the nights, at the monastery.

And gradually the inmates of the monastery increased.[1] Kāli, who was pining for such a life, returned after a month's stay at Vrindāban to live permanently at the monastery. Shashi joined after a few visits and a little hesitation. There were Tārak and Gopāl Senior. Rākhāl and others began to be drawn more and more to the Math, till the gathering of the young disciples at Āntpur turned the scale in favour of the Math. By the end of December, 1886, the Math had as its permanent members Narendra, Tārak, Gopāl Senior, Kāli and Shashi. Harish had come earlier and left soon after, since his wife made his proposed monasticism impossible for him. Gopāl Junior too returned home. And so with less than half a dozen all-renouncing enthusiasts, the monastery started on its career, creating history. Each man set about transforming his life into a ceaseless effort at realisation of that bliss of which he had heard and seen so much in the Master's life, and of which he had had some foretaste at Cossipore and Dakshineshwar.

While those memories were still stimulating the ardour in each youthful heart, there came to Bāburām an invitation from his mother to visit his village home at Āntpur, in the Hooghly district, twenty-four miles from Calcutta. The lady, a staunch devotee of the Master,

[1] It is difficult, if not impossible, to present chronologically the sequence in which the monks joined the Order. Readers may refer to *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 968: *Swāmi Brahmānanda* (in Bengali), pp. 109-14; *Life of Swāmi Vivekānanda*, 5th Impression, p. 157. The fragmentary evidence we have is not quite clear. The following is translated freely from an unpublished autobiography of Swāmi Abhedānanda: "After returning from Vrindāban I found that the upper storey of an old house of the Munshis had been hired at a monthly rent Rs. 11/-, and the Math started there by Suresh (i.e. Surendra) Mitra. There were Tārak, Gopāl Junior and Gopāl Senior. I too stayed on. Naren, Sharat and Shashi stayed at home and came off and on. There was no arrangement for the worship of the Master. We sat in meditation or for telling of the beads before the Master's bed; and food got by begging was cooked by us by turns."

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wanted her son to come there with Narendra. But as the news spread, the party swelled till at last one morning at the end of December, Narendra, Bāburām, Sharat, Shashi, Tārak, Kāli, Niranjan, Gangādhar and Sāradā started for the village from the house of Balarām Bose in Calcutta. They had with them musical instruments, to the accompaniment of which they sang religious songs on the train under Narendra's leadership. Thus the few hours of train journey passed in joy ; they reached Āntpur and settled down to a life of intense spiritual occupation during their visit. To inspire them, there was the robust enthusiasm of Narenda, who exhorted them not to waste their time, but to utilise it for devotional music, study, meditation, prayer, discussion and dissertation. To create a suitable atmosphere, there was the whole family of Bāburām firmly devoted to Shri Rāmakrishna. Bāburām was considered by the Master to belong to the highest category of his devotees—the Ishwarakotis, the divine class—to which also belonged Narendra, Rākhāl, Jogindra, Niranjan and Purna. Besides, Bāburām, according to the Master's vision, had in him something of the Divine Mother. He was pure—pure to the very marrow. And his sister, wife of Balarām Bose, was equally gifted with divine parts. His mother Mātangini Devi had met the Master quite a number of times, and was ranked very high by him in spirituality. The other members too were highly spiritual. In addition to this background of innate religious zeal and sincerity, the young aspirants benefited by the quietness of the countryside, so that under Narendra's leadership the spiritual fervour in their hearts rose to white heat. Narendra especially was captivated by his vision of the monastic life and would burst forth, "Let man-making be the goal of our lives! Let us make this our only spiritual endeavour. Away with vain learning! Let not the glamour of the world

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enslave our minds even for a moment! Realisation of God is the one and only thing in life! That is what Shri Rāmakrishna's life represented. We must realise God!" They talked of the Master, and thoughts of him were uppermost in their minds. The whole place became surcharged with a spirit of renunciation. Naturally, the bond of brotherhood was forged here indissolubly. It was an organic cohesion that could escape nobody's notice, and everyone was caught in its spell. It could not be otherwise; for the Master who had united them at Dakshineshwar, Shyāmpukur and Cossipore, was still a living presence working through them. He who had lived in flesh and blood as Shri Rāmakrishna was now about to reincarnate himself in his monastery.

All this took tangible shape one night near an open-air fire of huge logs, lighted in the compound of the house. Late in the evening the young aspirants had gathered round it with prayerful hearts under the canopy of a star-lit winter sky in a setting of ineffable peace. The meditation lasted long. Then Narendra began to relate the life-story of Jesus Christ. He ran through all the anecdotes beginning with the immaculate conception and ending with the resurrection, emphasising at every turn the life of renunciation that Jesus lived. Then the brother-disciples were introduced to the apostolic world, in which the grand message of redemption was carried to the ends of the earth by St. Paul and others. And in an inspired voice he exhorted them to be apostles themselves to carry abroad the new message for the uplift and salvation of mankind, till they rose up in a body, with the blazing fire in front and shining stars above as their witnesses, to pledge themselves to a life of renunciation. The very air was filled with spiritual vibrations, and strangely

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enough, they recollected, at the end of it all, that it was the eve of Christ's nativity.

Āntpur supplied the necessary spark to detonate the magazine of renunciation that each young man had become after the Master's departure. The remaining few now began to join the Math one by one. The newcomers were: Rākhāl, Niranjan, Bāburām, Sharat, Hari, Sāradā and Subodh. Lātu also joined after his return from Vrindāban, where he had spent about six months. Jogin stayed on at Vrindāban with the Holy Mother for another six months and took orders after returning to Calcutta. But the cutting off of the family bonds was not so easy as it appears in cold print. Narendra's problem we have already referred to. It had its repercussions on the young brotherhood. For instance, Sāradā complained that the leader's involvement in family affairs shook somewhat his own faith in himself. But Narendra was careful enough not to let others be affected by his personal problem. For instance, when Kāli inquired one day about the result of a particular lawsuit, Narendra curtly replied, "Why should you bother about that?" He knew that the two sides of his life could not be reconciled, though the conflict had to be endured. He was chafing under it.

Shashi's whole-souled service to the Master during his last illness was a familiar fact. And once he decided to live in the Math, he brought all his devotion and steadfastness to take up the daily worship of the Master as his sole duty. But he came of a family of moderate means, which expected much of him. He knew this, and also knew that such a demand was not unnatural. After all, the apostles of Shri Rāmakrishna were not heartless. Although they appeared outwardly to be harder than adamant, they were in fact softer than flowers, as the Sanskrit saying puts it. Shashi loved his parents and had a mind to improve their condition ; but

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the love of God proved stronger and swept away all other considerations, though the struggle in his heart continued for a while. And this was aggravated at times when his father came to the Math to take him home. Nevertheless, he finally decided that it was impossible for him to return home, since the Master had asked him to renounce "woman and gold."

The young men, outwardly at least, could not but be firm in their attitude towards their guardians, particularly when the importunities of the latter seemed to go too far. Rākhāl, for instance, said to his father under similar circumstances, "Why do you take all this trouble to come? I am quite happy here. Now bless me that I may forget you, and you too forget me."

Sharat had a problem of another kind. He had been studying in the Medical College, Calcutta. His father had the means to bear the expenses of his studies and was in no mood to part with him. But Narendra and Kāli would meet him in his study and talk with him for hours to wean him away from home influences. Sharat then began to visit the Math, and sometimes to spend the night there. His father reacted quickly and strongly. He first argued, and then, finding words useless, locked him in a room. Sharat, however, had not to remain imprisoned for many days; for a younger brother set him free to leave home permanently. Whatever vacillation he may have had in the beginning, had been chased away by the passion for renunciation roused at Āntpur.

Harināth felt the stirrings of renunciation in his heart soon after the Master's passing. Once he visited Kāmākhyā and Shillong without the knowledge of his family. After Āntpur he did not stay at home for many days. Gangādhar left home for good in February, 1887, to spend a few years in Tibet and to join the Barnagore monastery in the middle of 1890. Sāradā had once left

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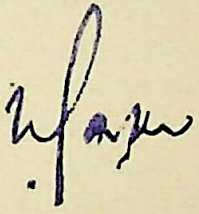
home during the Master's illness at Cossipore. Barnagore now gave him full opportunity for his natural tendency to renounce. And to this group came another ardent soul, Tulsi, who had seen the Master casually more than once, but had not associated with him intimately enough to be his disciple. At one period of his life, he prided himself on being the first disciple of Swāmi Vivekānanda, whose brother-disciples too looked upon him as such, though latterly he claimed to be a disciple of Shri Rāmakrishna. However that may be, he was the last but one of those who formed the first group of monks of the Order that had seen the Master. To complete the list we have only to add another direct disciple, Hari Prasanna, who joined much later, after Swāmi Vivekānanda's return from America.



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PREPARATION

(1887—1893)

The monastery was there, and the zeal of the monks was ever waxing. Perhaps that was the only thing that sustained them in those days ; for otherwise we cannot explain the unthinkable hardships that they willingly faced in their pursuit of God-realisation. Many of them had the promise of a comfortable life at home, and all could count on at least a moderate future income. Yet the call of the Beyond made the pursuit of worldly enjoyment seem empty. They loved God ; and as God and Mammon could not be worshipped at the same time, they preferred the path of God, although it would be walking on a razor's edge. Let us for a while look more closely at the activities of the life they led.

To quote from the *Life of Swāmi Vivekānanda* (pp. 160-61): "Unwilling to beg, they lived on what chance would bring. They vied with one another in doing the household tasks, even the most menial ones. Many were the days when there was nothing to eat, but the spiritual discourses, meditation and singing went on as though their bodies did not exist. Their only clothes were the Kaupina (loin cloth) and a few Geruā [ochre-coloured] pieces ; a mat on the floor sufficed for their bed ; a few pictures of saints and a Tānpurā (stringed musical instrument) hung from the walls. Their whole library consisted of about a hundred books in all. There was only one [presentable] piece of cloth and a chuddar to be worn about the shoulders, which were common property and were hung upon a line, so

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that whosoever had to leave the premises might have the wherewith to be clothed respectably."

And from the stray remarks preserved in books or orally communicated, we get glimpses of the mental conditions of the inmates individually and collectively. Often enough they performed day-long meditation at Dakshineshwar or night-long vigil and prayer at the Cossipore cremation ground. Not satisfied with mere struggle, somebody complained that their renunciation had been in vain, inasmuch as they had not seen God, to which Narendra sharply replied, "Must we make a compromise with the world because we have not attained God?" In other words, even if God did not deign to show Himself, it behoved His devotees to be unremitting in their efforts to the exclusion of other thoughts. And impelled by such a sentiment, Rākhāl was not content even with the nerve-racking struggle at Barnagore ; he thought of solitary practice on the bank of the Narmadā. Sāradā felt that his stay at Barnagore was a waste of time, since God had not been realised ; so he started on a journey alone to the North, where he planned to make more rigorous efforts. But circumstances compelled him to retrace his steps in a couple of days. Shashi found his life's fulfilment in the worship of the Master. For even when others felt restive and wandered away, he kept himself bound to his self-imposed duties. In fact, he was in a sense the keystone of the Math. When there was no food in store, Shashi would quietly beg from a kindly neighbour something to offer to the Master—say a few ounces of rice and one or two potatoes. He moved secretly, because the neighbourhood entertained no good feeling for these crazy educated youths, whose motives and behaviour were a puzzle to them ; and they feared that they would mislead other boys as well. This little food Shashi would cook and offer to the Master, and then divide the consecrated food into small balls to be thrust

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into the mouths of the fasting brothers engaged in devotional music in the hall. Kāli, bent on attaining knowledge, spent the whole day in his room studying and meditating, despite Narendra's advice to the contrary, thereby getting the appellation of Kāli the ascetic. Some of the brothers, for instance, Bāburām, Sharat and Kāli, would go out now and then to holy places for more intimate communion with God, while Tārak, moaning over the happy days of Dakshineshwar and Cossipore, would sing with a sweet but plaintive voice the song of the Gopis under similar circumstances.

Narendra himself best summed up the hardships and the mental atmosphere of those days. After his triumphant return from the West in 1897, a disciple questioned him about the life at Barnagore, "Mahārāj (i.e., Sir), how did you maintain yourselves at that time?" With the memory of those glorious days flitting across his mind, he replied, "What a silly question! We were Sannyāsins, don't you see? We never thought of the morrow. . . . We used to live on what chance brought. There were days at the Barnagore Math when we had nothing to eat. If there was rice, salt was lacking. . . . Leaves of the Bimba creeper boiled, salt and rice—this was our menu for months. . . . We were being carried along on a strong tide of meditation and other religious practices. Oh, what days! Demons would have run away at the sight of such austerities, to say nothing of men!"

Those were indeed strenuous days. There was a round of meditation, reading, recital, discussion, music and dance almost throughout the twenty-four hours of the day. The neighbours remonstrated, but to no effect. Kant, Hegel, Mill and Spencer were studied with avidity and criticised without mercy. The Hindu systems of philosophy came in for their due share of attention, and so did the Bible and the Buddhistic literature. Even

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atheism was not neglected and sociology, literature, art and science were touched upon. Pundits came and argued, and guardians visited and implored them to reverse the course of their life. But that impetuous flow of spirituality was not to be checked.

Along with all this, there was the lighter side of their life too. Sharat had a soft, feminine voice. Late one night the monks sat round to hear him sing, with all the outer entrances barred. When critical neighbours heard the music, their suspicions were aroused, and considering this to be a good opportunity to expose these pretentious young fellows, they scaled the boundary wall and scrambled into the hall to find, to their utter discomfiture, that they were entirely mistaken. They, however, acknowledged their mistake, and the brotherhood led them out courteously without a protest.

It was a known fact in those days that the Barnagore Math paid reverence to Christ. It celebrated Christ's nativity every year according to its means. And Shashi, though coming from an orthodox brahmin family, studied the New Testament thoroughly. As this news got abroad, some over-enthusiastic preachers of the Salvation Army thought this to be a fruitful field and visited the monastery a number of times. But one day a preacher asserted dogmatically that Christ was the only saviour of the world. Naturally, Shashi and others joined issue with him. Outwitted by Shashi's mastery of the Bible, the preacher referred to the material benefits to be derived from Christianity. This offended Shashi's sense of propriety, and he openly said that the preacher was unworthy of the faith he represented. Finding things taking an ugly turn, the preacher beat a hasty retreat—for good.

And there was Tārak to keep them in good humour with his mimicry of the oddities of life, not sparing

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even his brother-disciples, though he was careful at the end to apologise, saying, "Don't you take offence, my brothers, just because I have a little fun at your expense!" The Bengali poet Michael Madhusudan Datta sometimes claimed his attention with his peculiar coining of words ; and there were the strange languages, Pushtu and so on, to offer him an opportunity for raising side-splitting laughter through hilarious imitation.

The life of spiritual exaltation was intensified by various Hindu festivals. The Shivarātri with its fast, vigil and worship was naturally the favourite with them. From *The Gospel of Sri Rāmakrishna* we get a glimpse of the pattern of celebration they held on that day and night. As soon as Mahendra Nāth Gupta, author of the *Gospel*, arrived on February 21, 1887, Tārak, joined by Rākhāl, began to dance singing a Bengali song composed by Narendra about Shiva's ecstatic dance. And then Sharat sang. After night-fall, the brotherhood, all clad in the ochre robes of monks, gathered under the Bel tree in the compound where the worship was to be performed four times during the four watches of the night. In the interval, Kāli read the *Gitā* and argued with Narendra against the existence of a creator God. Finishing the *Gitā*, he uttered the benediction, "Peace, peace, peace!" The recital over, they circled round and round the tree singing in chorus and dancing. When the day dawned, they all bathed in the Ganges. Then returning to the monastery, they prostrated themselves in the shrine before the Master's picture and then assembled in the hall to partake of the fruits and sweets sent for their breakfast by Balarām Bose.

Here we must mention that with the coming of Shashi, the worship of the Master became a very prominent feature of the monastery. The most notable part of his worship was the zest and attention to details with which it was performed. To him the Master was

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still a living presence, and the worship was really a service to him just as it used to be when he was still on this earth. Shashi's daily duties included plucking flowers, cleaning the shrine room and scouring vessels for worship. After his ablution in the Ganges, he carried the holy water for the day's use in the shrine. In the forenoon there was regular worship, followed by the offering of food. During vesper, Shashi danced ecstatically as he waved the light, and uttered with rapture, "Jay Gurudev (victory to the blessed Guru)! Shri Gurudev!" to which others joined their voices from the adjoining room. This continued for a long time. Then the brotherhood sang in chorus the prayer usually heard at vesper in the temple of Vishwanātha at Benares: "Jaya Shiva Omkāra! Bhaja Shiva Omkāra!" etc. Then they saluted the Master with some Sanskrit verses from the *Guru-gitā*. This was followed by a more direct salutation through a verse composed by Kāli to the following effect: "I bow my head before the adorable Supreme Lord Shri Rāmakrishna, who is taintless, eternal and of infinite forms—the Incarnation of God who has assumed a body to bless His devotees."

Surendra Nāth Mitra was their financier. But he lived in Calcutta, and could not have first-hand knowledge of the wants of the monks. Yet he was liberal-minded enough to come to their rescue whenever he heard of any difficulty. And there was the kind-hearted Balarām Bose. Once on a surprise visit to the Math, he was pained to see the young monks appeasing their hunger with rice and a cheap preparation of Bimba leaves. Returning home, he asked his wife to serve him only that kind of food for the day. The good lady thought that it was Balarām's usual loss of appetite, but on pressing the question, she found out that he had not the relish for rich food when the Master's sons fared thus. From then he made it a rule to send them some

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vegetables regularly, and he instructed the Math cook to inform him whenever the stock ran short, for he knew that the monks would rather starve than ask of him.

Thus it went on for some time. But God wanted to test the monks more rigorously by removing both these sincere friends from the earth in close succession —Balarām Bose on April 13, and Surendra on May 25, 1890. At this moment of trial, Girish Chandra Ghosh plunged into the breach for a while, and Shashi took up teaching in a local High School for two or three months.

While events moved thus at Barnagore, a wonderful change came over the Holy Mother who was then at Vrindāban. She who was destined to take up the spiritual reins of the expanding brotherhood in the near future, initiated her first disciple, Jogindra (Swāmi Yogānanda) at this time under the direction of the Master, who appeared to her in a vision and said, "Give this Mantra to Jogin." The Mother disbelieved her eyes twice, and on the third occasion she remonstrated that she was not mentally prepared for this, nor did the circumstances favour such a bold step so soon after the Master's departure. But the Master was unrelenting; and Jogindra, when consulted, confirmed that he too had a similar command from the Master to be initiated. So, when seated in worship, in an ecstatic mood the Mother called Jogin to herself and imparted the Mantra in such an unnaturally loud voice that it could be heard from the adjacent room.

From Vrindāban the Holy Mother returned with her party to Calcutta in August, 1887. Then she went to Kāmārpukur, the Master's village, for a long stay. Thereafter she sometimes lived in Calcutta or its outskirts, where the monks could properly serve her, and sometimes went on pilgrimage or spent some months at

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Kāmārpukur or Jayrāmbāti, the village of her nativity. It is not necessary for our purpose to go into the details of these movements. Suffice it to say that from 1890, her rightful place as the spiritual guide in succession to the Master began to be increasingly recognised, though there were the children of the Master as well, more particularly Narendra and Rākhāl, to share the responsibility with her.

Though we may pass over the details of the Holy Mother's life, it will repay our labour to follow it for a while in a general way to understand intelligently the working of the new organisation. We saw her merely as the partner of Shri Rāmakrishna. That in itself meant much; for to live in daily contact, through dedicated service, with one whose spirituality was a roaring fire, could not but set ablaze the dormant spiritual ardour of others. So the Holy Mother, who from birth was purity itself, came to be thoroughly moulded after his pattern. Besides, the Master actively accelerated the process. Apart from that, any one who studies her life is impressed by the fact that she was innately a spiritual genius of extraordinary power. That is why she could keep her head cool when worshipped by Shri Rāmakrishna himself, who had by then been acclaimed as an Incarnation. And that is why even a robber who came to kill turned prayerful before her superb and disarming innocence. This was when, on her way to Dakshineshwar from Jayrāmbāti, she was once walking all alone through a desolate tract after dusk, having been left behind by her companions with her consent for fear of all being waylaid. The robber had approached her menacingly, club in hand, but stood spellbound, awed by what he saw in her face, as he himself confessed afterwards. Then he, along with his wife, took care of the Holy Mother for the night, and next day conducted her to her comrades.

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Her life at Dakshineshwar was one of continuous vigilant service to the Master. And along with her exacting duties, her prayer and meditation went on almost ceaselessly. She herself said afterwards that in spite of her preoccupations, she could repeat her Mantra a hundred thousand times daily!

Her absorption in meditation and frequent ecstatic moods could be witnessed only by those who were fortunate enough to live in close contact with her. Except the earlier months, when she lived in the Master's room, the remaining years of her life at Dakshineshwar were mostly spent in the lower storey of the extremely small music tower, which served as her kitchen, store, bedroom, shrine, parlour and all. Being shy, she did not stir in the day-time out of that solitary cell with no convenience. Such was her life of penance. And only when women devotees began to come, did she now and then get companions, such as Jogin Mā, Golāp Mā and others. These have testified that on several occasions they found the Mother in deep moods of spiritual absorption both at Dakshineshwar and elsewhere.

After the Master's passing away, the Holy Mother redoubled her spiritual efforts, and her whole life became a constant pattern of hard struggle and spiritual illumination. It was at Belur, across the Ganges from Calcutta, that on a full-moon night, sitting above the steps leading to the Ganges, she saw Shri Rāmakrishna enter the water and dissolve in it, while from somewhere came Narendra to take up handfuls of that water and sprinkle it on the assembled multitude, who became at once liberated. This to her mind symbolised the future of the Rāmakrishna Order. It was to save the world with the Master's message.

Such spiritual exercises and visions and trances apart, she was growing all the time as the Mother of all, for that was the role that the Providence had marked

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out for her. So full of love and compassion and so sweet in her talk and dealings was she that people could scarcely make any distinction between her and their own mothers.

Such was the Holy Mother. Let us now return to the organisation which she was to foster indirectly. At this time we find the sons of the Master going to places of pilgrimage and practising spiritual austerities, sometimes crossing rivers or scaling mountains for this purpose. We have noted that shortly after the Master's passing, Gangādhar left for Tibet, and joined the Barnagore Math as late as 1890. Niranjan went to Puri in April, 1887; and Bāburām, Sharat and Kāli went on foot to Puri some time after the birthday celebration of the Master in 1887. Rākhāl went there with the Holy Mother in November, 1888; but as such brief halts at holy places could not satisfy the hunger of his heart for more sustained and intimate divine communion, he left the monastery in December, 1889, to return there after five years at the end of 1894. Jogin generally moved about with the Holy Mother, so that his stay at Barnagore was never very long. This cannot be said of Bāburām, who was generally at Barnagore or Calcutta. Niranjan's pilgrimages too seem to have been few and far between. From 1888 onward Tārak used to go out on short pilgrimages almost every year, though his sojourn extended at times to months. Sharat visited Puri a second time with the Holy Mother in November, 1888. After returning from there, he stayed at Barnagore for some time and then started for northern India for the purpose of pilgrimage and spiritual effort, from which he returned to Barnagore in September, 1891. Kāli too went out in 1889 and occupied himself with visiting holy places and studying the scriptures. He felt a disinclination to return to the Math soon, but at Narendra's persuasion came back in 1892, when the

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Math had shifted to Ālambāzār. As for Lātu, he was often enough in the Holy Mother's company, though more often he lived an independent life outside the Math. Hari went out in 1889, to come back only in 1894. Subodh and Sāradā too had their periods of pilgrimage and solitary struggle. Narendra also went out at first on short pilgrimages. Finally, in the middle of 1890 he left for an unknown destination, to return victorious from the West in 1897.

This brief account will impress on the reader the fact that during the period under discussion the Math was very much in a fluid state, with very few resident monks. For a time things did not look bright. Some entertained doubts about its permanence. Naturally the Holy Mother was much perturbed by this state of affairs. And her prayer went up to the Master, "O Lord, you came, disported yourself with these few and then went away ; should everything end with that? If so, where was the need for your coming down in the midst of so much misery? I have seen in Benares and Vrindāban many holy men who get their food by begging and shift their stay from the shade of one tree to that of another. There is no dearth of holy men of that type. I cannot bear to see the plight of my sons, who go forth in your name, roaming about begging their food. My prayer is that those who leave the world in your name may never be in want of bare subsistence. They will all live together holding to your ideas and ideals ; and people afflicted with the sorrows of the world will resort to them and be solaced by hearing about you. That is why you came. My heart aches to see them wandering." Future developments will show that the Master granted her prayer, though after a little more tribulation.

We have purposely avoided so far referring to one fact, which is important from the point of view of the orthodox monks, viz., the exact time when the apostles

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of Shri Rāmakrishna formally embraced monasticism by taking the ritual vow of renunciation and changing their original names. This is anybody's guess. We saw the monks putting on ochre clothes soon after their return from Āntpur. Even earlier they must occasionally have used the ochre robes given them by the Master. Spiritually speaking, they had their actual initiation into the monastic life right then. While this is true, we also know that they did on a certain occasion light the sacrificial fire to pour oblations into it with Vedic Mantras, as they ceremonially accepted the vows of monasticism in a group. Most probably they also took monastic names from that day. But unfortunately the exact date is missing, perhaps for ever. With regard to this subject, a passage discovered by the disciples of Swāmi Abhedānanda in his unpublished autobiography is presented here in translation: "One day Narendra said, 'We shall take orders in accordance with the scriptural injunctions.' When I was consulted, I said, 'The Vedic Sannyāsa requires Virajā Homa.' I had secured the Mantras for this Homa. With the help of these, the Virajā Homa was performed one day (beginning of Māgh,[1] 1293 Bengali Era) in the shrine in front of the Master's slippers. Naren as our leader poured the oblation, and by the grace of the Lord I, after sanctifying the fire, went on reading out the Mantras for him; and the Lord made me utter the sacred formula of Sannyāsa for all to repeat. Niranjan, Naren, Shashi, Sharat, Rākhāl, Sāradā, Bāburām and I poured oblations simultaneously in the Virajā Homa, and we became brother-disciples."

The present writer is told that the date "beginning of Māgh, 1293 B.E." stands in Swāmi Abhedānanda's own handwriting, though the ink is red, the rest of the record being in black. We have no idea as to what

[1] Third week of January, 1887 A.D.

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this may mean. From the Bengali life of Swāmi Abhedānanda by his disciple Swāmi Shankarānanda (p. 48), we know that Kāli once got the news from Vijay Krishna Goswāmi, who came to see the Master at Cossipore, that in a cave of the Barābar Hill, near Gayā, lived a monk who was an adept in Hatha-yoga. This tempted Kāli to go there. At the foot of the hill he met a monk of the Puri Order of Shankarāchārya, from whom he copied down the Mantras of Virajā Homa, as also esoteric designations of that Order, to which, by the way, Totā Puri also belonged. Evidently, Kāli used these Mantras in the Virajā Homa described above. We have no authority to question the validity of this record. But our misfortune is that we miss much important detail in this valuable account. What, for instance, were the names assumed by the monks? Why were not the other monks of the Barnagore Math present on that occasion? And if they were absent on pilgrimage on that day, when were they formally initiated into Sannyāsa? And what is really meant by the term "brother-disciples" in this context?

The next important reference we find is in a letter dated January 8, 1890, written by Swāmi Shivānanda to Gangādhar (Swāmi Akhandānanda), then moving about on the Himalayan heights. It is obvious from this letter that the ceremony had been performed earlier; but at the same time he warns Gangādhar, "You wanted to know our monastic names. I give them below. But please do not address the letters here in those names." One cannot discover the motive behind this warning. Was it because the names had not even then become familiar and might cause unnecessary complications? For we have it from Swāmi Akhandānanda's Bengali Memoirs, *Smritikathā* (p. 53), that in the early days of the Barnagore Math, the Sannyāsins, although they wore the ochre-coloured cloth

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indoors, used to put on white cloth when going out. He also mentions Naren, Rākhāl, Bāburām, Sharat, Shashi, Subodh, Lātu, Gopāl (Senior), Tārak and Kāli as having performed the Virajā Homa "within two years of the Master's passing away." Of course, he himself was not present at the ceremony, and it was on his return to the monastery that he took the monastic vow and the name of Swāmi Akhandānanda.

Another intriguing fact is that some names are common to all the three lists, while some others are missing from the one or the other. To say the least, it is all very confusing. The list of Swāmi Shivānanda runs thus:

Niranjan	..	Niranjanānanda Swāmi
Jogen	..	Yogānanda Swāmi
Bāburām	..	Premānanda Swāmi
Lātu	..	Adbhutānanda Swāmi
Shashi	..	Rāmakrishnānanda Swāmi
Hari Bābu	..	Turiyānanda Swāmi
Tulsi	..	Nirmalānanda Swāmi
Daksha	..	Jnānānanda Swāmi
Kāli	..	Abhedānanda Swāmi
Gopāl Dādā	..	Advaitānanda Swāmi

To these we must add the writer (Tārak) himself who signs as Shivānanda.

Narendra, according to some accounts, first took the name of Vividishānanda. Subsequently he changed it to Sachchidānanda, and finally to Vivekānanda. This was with a view to hiding his identity while travelling in India, so that his brother-disciples might not search him out and deter him from his quest. The others omitted in Swāmi Shivānanda's list came to be known thus:

Rākhāl	..	Swāmi Brahmānanda
Sharat	..	Swāmi Sāradānanda
Sāradā	..	Swāmi Trigunātitānanda
Subodh	..	Swāmi Subodhānanda

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In Swāmi Shivānanda's list is found a fresh name, that of Daksha, a new entrant. And this brings us to a new phase of the organisation. It was now slowly attracting young men of parts who had not seen the Master, but who were inspired by his message. As early as 1888, Swāmi Vivekānanda, when on a pilgrimage, met Sharat Chandra Gupta, the station-master of Hathras, near Vrindāban. Gupta followed the Swāmi at once as a monk, and later became known as Swāmi Sadānanda. In 1891, Swāmi Sāradānanda, during his stay at Benares, initiated a gentleman named Dinanāth into Sannyāsa and renamed him Swāmi Sachchidānanda. Being an elderly man, his popular name in the Order was Budo Bābā, the old father.

It was in 1891-92 that a fine cultured group of young men began to frequent the Barnagore Math, and soon became attracted by Swāmi Rāmakrishnānanda. In a way, this group succeeded as leaders the direct disciples of the Master. They were Sudhir Chandra Chakravarti, Kālikrishna Bose, Khagendra Nāth Chatterjee, Govinda Chandra Shukul, Haripada Chatterjee and Sushil Chandra Chakravarti, who took orders to become Swāmis Shuddhānanda, Virajānanda, Vimalānanda, Ātmānanda, Bodhānanda and Prakashānanda respectively. Of these Swāmi Shuddhānanda was initiated into Sannyāsa by Swāmi Niranjanānanda, and the rest by Swāmi Vivekānanda after his return from the West. This young group at first frequented the Kānkurgāchhi Yogodyāna, presided over by Rām Chandra Datta. They learnt much about the Master there, but ultimately veered round to the Barnagore monastery, impelled by an innate preference for renunciation, which Rām Chandra could not ensure for them.

Another important event at the end of this period was the shifting of the Math in November, 1891 to Ālambāzār. The house stood midway between Barnagore

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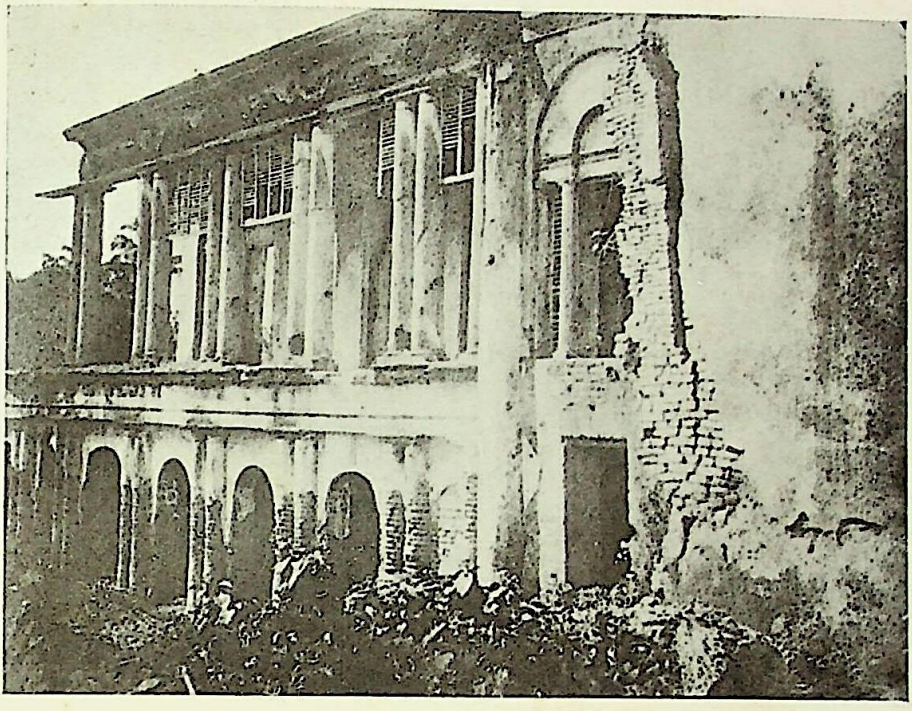

BARNAGORE MONASTERY

ĀLAMBĀZĀR MONASTERY

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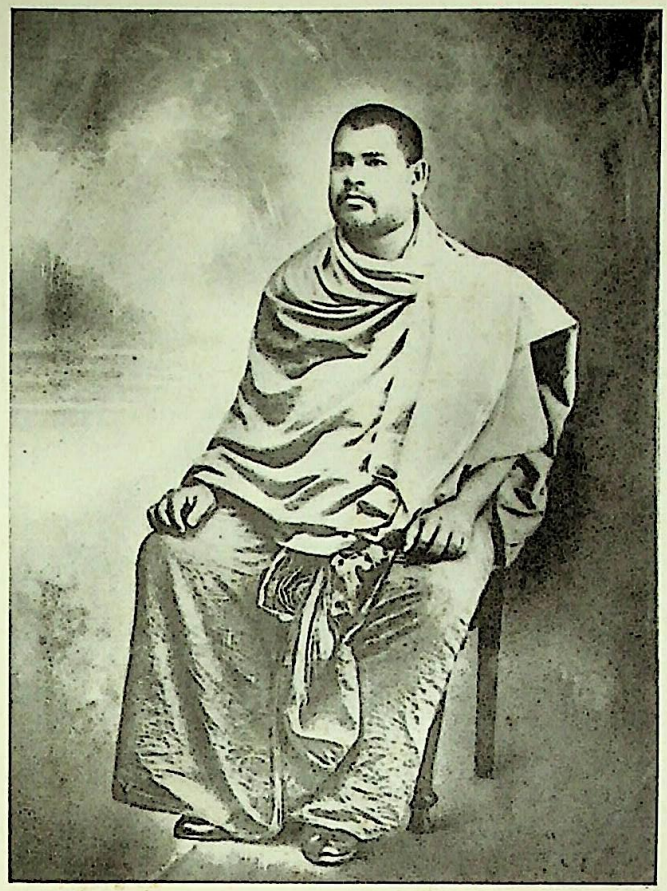
SWĀMI BRAHMĀNANDA
(1863—1922)



SWAMI RĀMAKRISHNĀNANDA
(1863—1911)

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and Dakshineshwar on the road running from Calcutta to the latter place. It was a commodious two-storied building on the road leading westward to Lochan Ghosh's Ghat on the Ganges, and had a long verandah with round pillars. The main entrance, however, was on the lane on the eastern side. The house was divided into two apartments. In the ground floor of the outer apartment, there were two dark rooms, one of which had the ill fame of being haunted. As such they were seldom used, though Swāmi Trigunātitānanda went to the bigger one for occasional meditation and study. The first floor had a long hall, which was used as a parlour in the day-time and a bedroom at night for eight to ten people. Proceeding from the hall southward along the eastern verandah, one came to the southern verandah, to the south of which were the shrine room and three bedrooms, separated by a wide passage. The inner apartment too had a courtyard with covered verandahs on three sides, the eastern side alone having a large open terrace. South of the shrine there was a small room to store things for worship. On the ground floor there were four rooms and a kitchen. Two of these served as stores, and one was used for keeping Ganges water in big jars. The fourth room was occasionally occupied by Gopāler Mā, an elderly lady, or Gauri Mā, both disciples of the Master. There was also a pond. A portion of the lower verandah served as the place for dining. Being haunted, the house was secured for the paltry sum of ten rupees per month.[1]

It is high time now to return to the leader, Swāmi Vivekānanda, and follow him in his pilgrimage and peregrination from Calcutta to Garhwāl and from there to Cape Comorin. But we must take long strides so as to finish the itinerary rapidly. Swāmi Vivekānanda started

[1] This description of the premises is based mainly on the memoirs of Swāmi Virajānanda, quoted in *Atiter Smriti*, pp. 54-55.

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from Barnagore in July, 1890, with the blessings of the Holy Mother, who was then staying at Ghushuri, near Belur. The Swāmi said, "Mother, if I can become a man in the true sense of the term, then only shall I return ; else this will be my last farewell." Taken aback, the Mother said, "You should not say so!" The Swāmi said, "No, no, by your grace I shall soon come back." But that was not to be till 1897.

The Swāmi moved on from place to place. In the beginning he had some of his brother-disciples with him ; but later on he avoided them and even changed his name to remain incognito. But the sun cannot be concealed from view for ever by tiny passing clouds, and off and on his brother-disciples discovered him, only to be persuaded to leave him alone. Thus he moved on, urged by a spiritual destiny and studying India at first hand. North India revealed to him many social inequities standing side by side with religious formalism and decadence. In Western India he had first-hand acquaintance with princely opulence combined with callousness for others, and Sanskrit culture surrounded by ignorance of the world. In South India he came face to face with social oppression amounting to lunacy, as well as faith in the ancient culture struggling hard against the rising tide of Occidental ideas and reform. And as a common feature of India as a whole, he found poverty, squalor, loss of mental vigour and hope for the future, disintegration of age-old institutions, conservatism trying to hold its own under the guise of spirituality and pseudo-reforms, lack of organised effort, and the waves of Western science and culture as well as Christianity beating furiously against her shores ; in short, he found the glorious India of yore fallen and prostrate, the only hope being that she still held on to the one source of her life—her religion. The sight was

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bleak and disheartening. Could he help in any way to raise up his motherland? He must!

One may believe in a good cause ; one may resolve to serve it ; and yet one may not have any plan ; or if one has, one may lack the wherewithal to carry it out. Gradually it dawned on Vivekānanda that he could get the help he needed only by going to the West. As to what form that aid would take, and in what way he would utilise it, perhaps he had no definite idea in those days. For this inchoate idea to take workable shape, he had to wait till his visit to Cape Comorin. Yet from his letters and later utterances we know that his mind was working on some such plan of getting help for India by visiting the West. In its developed form the scheme envisaged a process of give and take, through which India would disseminate her spirituality and get in exchange Western financial help, mental vigour, material science, power of organisation, etc. But as yet the scheme had to await fuller maturity as well as the means for its execution.

All this while there had been loose talk of a Parliament of Religions in America, where representatives of different faiths from all over the world would meet and hold discussions. That was an occasion to be taken advantage of. But unorganised Hindu India only talked and expressed pious wishes, without formulating any practical plan for sending a representative of Hinduism as such who could speak before the Parliament boldly without apologies and compromises. And as Swāmi Vivekānanda travelled from city to city, and village to village, he heard these vague discussions and joined in them half-heartedly.

However, even before the talk about the Parliament started, Swāmi Vivekānanda, under the guidance of an unseen hand, had begun to prepare himself in various ways for this adventure. At Meerut, near Delhi, he

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finished the works of Sir John Lubbock. Kālidāsa too got his share of attention, and the *Vishnu Purāna* its honoured place. In Rajputana and Western India he studied Vedic grammar and the Vedas under erudite scholars. At Porbandar he refreshed his knowledge of Sanskrit literature and got introduced to the French language. In fact, he was a lifelong scholar, with his mind open to all healthy influences of culture and religion. He believed neither in intellectual snobbery nor in religious bigotry; and when faced with carping criticism, for what appeared to others as want of faith in anything, he replied, "My motto is to learn, to recognise good, no matter where I may come across it. This leads my friends to think that I may lose my devotion to the guru. These are ideas of lunatics and bigots. For all gurus are one, fragments and radiations of God, the Universal Guru" (*Life of Swāmi Vivekānanda*, p. 188). And as he had tried to learn yoga from Pavhāri Bābā of Ghāzipur despite protest, so also he studied Sanskrit, English and French without caring for the opinion of others.

And as he grew in mental stature, he felt a strange stirring of power within him. To his brother-disciple Abhedānanda he said at Bombay in 1892, "Kāli, so much energy has accumulated in me that I am afraid I may burst." But if Vivekānanda was a scholar, a dynamic person and a man of various parts—in fact a genius, he was a man of heart as well. When, on the eve of leaving for the West, he was met near Mount Ābu by Swāmi Turiyānanda, who asked him about his spiritual realisation, the Swāmi replied, "Brother Hari (Turiyānanda), I do not quite understand what spirituality is," and he paused for a while, his countenance expressing a deep-seated sorrow; then he added with assurance, "but my heart has expanded very much, and I have learnt to feel. Believe me. I feel intensely indeed."

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So this man of genius, energy, heart, vision and realisation was anxious to do something for his countrymen in distress, as also for humanity in general. And as he met the intelligentsia that could understand him, he received encouragement for carrying out his plan. It was the court Pundit of Porbandar, it seems, who was the first to say openly that the Swāmi would be best appreciated by the West. The Swāmi heard, but kept silent; for the time was not yet ripe. The idea, however, went on developing, and at Khāndwā it emerged out of its nebulous state. The Swāmi here opened his mind for the first time to tell Haridās Chatterjee that if the means were forthcoming, he was ready to go to Chicago. At Belgaum, at the house of Haripada Mitra, he was more unreserved in his talk, and Mr. Mitra jumped at the idea. But it seemed Swāmiji was still studying the reactions of others. He would not allow any practical step just then. At Mysore too he unburdened his mind to the Maharaja, who offered to bear the expenses. But Swāmiji preferred to wait; something still held him back.

By stages he reached Cape Comorin, famous all over India for the very sacred temple of Kanyā-Kumāri, the Divine Mother in the prime of her life, engaged in severe austerities to gain the favour of Shiva. There Swāmi Vivekānanda sat in meditation on a rock out in the sea—almost the last bit of India. On one side of him there was the vast land of India—mute, inactive, humbled and despondent, yet clinging with all her might to her invaluable treasure of spirituality—and on another side spread the infinite ocean—ever agitated, ever varying in moods, ever striking its shores with destructive violence, and symbolising the inexhaustible play of human energy that lay on the other shore. The scene vividly dramatised the mental problem of the Swāmi at that time. Was there a solution to this apparent

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contradiction? Could the East and the West ever meet in terms of friendship? Could spirituality and material prosperity co-operate for the betterment of humanity as a whole? As he pondered, a definite plan flashed into his mind, and he rose from his lonely seat, in those closing days of 1892, an enlightened Seer of the modern age, with the new light shimmering in his eyes. Alluding to this event he wrote from Chicago in 1894, "At Cape Comorin, sitting in Mother Kumāri's temple, sitting on the last bit of Indian rock, I hit upon a plan: We are so many Sannyāsins wandering about, and teaching the people metaphysics—it is all madness. Did not our Gurudeva [often] say, 'An empty stomach is no good for religion'? . . . Suppose some disinterested Sannyāsins, bent on doing good to others, go from village to village, disseminating education and seeking in various ways to better the condition of all down to the Chandāla, through oral teaching and by means of maps, cameras, globes and such other accessories—can't that bring forth good in time? . . . We have to give back to the nation its lost individuality, and *raise the masses*. . . . Again, the force to raise them must come from inside, that is, from the orthodox Hindus. In every country the evils exist not with, but against, religion. Religion, therefore, is not to blame, but men. To effect this, the first thing we need is men, and the next is funds. Through the grace of our guru I was sure to get from ten to fifteen men in every town. I next travelled in search of funds ; but do you think the people of India were going to spend money! . . . Therefore I have come to America, to earn money myself, and then return to my country and devote the rest of my days to the realisation of this one aim of my life. As our country is poor in social virtues, so this country is lacking in spirituality. I give them spirituality, and they give me money" (*Complete Works,* VI, pp. 254-55).

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And in an earlier letter dated August 20, 1893, he writes from America: "And oh, my heart ached to think of what we think of the poor, the low, in India. They have no chance, no escape, no way to climb up. . . . Thoughtful people within the last few years have seen it, but unfortunately laid it at the door of Hindu religion, and to them the only way of betterment is by crushing this grandest religion of the world. Hear me, my friend, I have discovered the secret through the grace of the Lord. Religion is not at fault. On the other hand, your religion teaches you that every being is only your own self multiplied. But it was the want of practical application, the want of sympathy, the want of heart. . . . This state of things must be removed, not by destroying religion, but by following the great teachings of the Hindu faith, and joining with it the wonderful sympathy of that logical development of Hinduism—Buddhism. . . . I am called by the Lord for this. I have been dragged through a whole life of crosses and tortures, I have seen the nearest and dearest die, almost of starvation ; I have been ridiculed, distrusted, and have suffered for my sympathy for the very men who scoff and scorn. . . . Trust not to the so-called rich, they are more dead than alive. . . . Have faith in the Lord ; no policy, it is nothing. . . . I have travelled twelve years with this load in my heart and this idea in my head. I have gone from door to door of the so-called rich and great. With a bleeding heart I have crossed half the world to this strange land, seeking for help. The Lord is great. I know He will help me" (*Complete Works,* V, pp. 11-14).

So Swāmiji almost made up his mind and mentally figured out the broad outlines of his plan, in spite of a lingering hesitation that it might all be a figment of his feverish brain, afflicted by the sight of misery and helplessnesss all around. With his mind swinging thus

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between doubt and certainty, he reached Madras and spoke more openly about his intention to go to the United States. This fired the enthusiasm of a group of youthful admirers, who, believing in him whole-heartedly, at once set about collecting funds. But Swāmiji disapproved of their action, declaring that the money would come of itself if it was the Mother's will. So at his advice the money collected was distributed among the poor, and in February, 1893, he left for Hyderabad, where on February 13 he delivered a lecture at the Mahboob College before an audience of more than one thousand persons, on "My Mission to the West." It was a great success.

Apropos of this, it may be mentioned that though we have met the Swāmi thus far as a wandering monk, a studious scholar and an earnest planner of his country's good, he had all along been evolving as a spiritual teacher. He had accepted some as his disciples by initiating them with Mantras. And he had imparted religious instruction generally through informal talk or conversazione, though public speaking too had not been discarded. For instance, he had spoken at the Mysore Palace before a gathering of Sanskrit scholars. Yet Hyderabad bore real testimony to his power of expression as a religious preacher.

After his return from Hyderabad, his Madras admirers started collecting money once again. This time the Swāmi did not stand in their way. But he still prayed for some sign of divine approval. While in this state of mind, he saw one night in a dream Shri Rāmakrishna walking over the sea from this shore towards the other and beckoning him to follow. He awoke with a composed mind and heard the divine command, "go." Still, to be doubly sure, he wrote to the Holy Mother in Calcutta praying for her blessing; and as soon as this came, he overcame all his lingering

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vacillation. The money and the ways and means for the journey were found instantaneously; and at long last on May 31, 1893, he sailed from Bombay for the shores of the new continent per S.S. *Peninsular*. As the ship moved away, the Swāmi stood pensive for a while on the deck, gazing on the vanishing shores of his beloved India; and his mind lingered over the days at Dakshineshwar, Cossipore, Barnagore, and all the great places of India made precious to him by their past spiritual associations. Then he turned his back with a sigh saying mentally, "Verily, from the land of renunciation I go to the land of enjoyment," though for him there was to be no enjoyment.

The Swāmi proceeded by way of Colombo, Hongkong and Japan, obtaining glimpses of the great cradles of ancient civilisation and the land of the rising sun, where Asia was just showing her indomitable power of rising afresh from the ashes of past decadence like the phoenix of mythology. There was hope before him and a mighty culture behind, the spirit of which he had sedulously assimilated and was carrying with him as his only capital. We cannot close this topic of Swāmi Vivekānanda's preparedness for the Western work more fittingly than by summing up his intellectual and spiritual equipment in the words of a "disciple" who wrote in the *Brahmavādin* (Vol. XIII, pp. 565-66): "During his travels, by turns he realised the essence of Buddhism and Jainism, the spirit of Rāmānanda and Dayānanda. He had become a profound student of Tulsidās and Nishchaldās. He had learnt all about the saints of Mahārāshtra and the Ālwārs and Nāyanārs of Southern India. From the Paramahamsa Parivrājakāchārya to the poor Bhangi Mehtar (sweeper) disciple of Lālguru he had learnt not only their hopes and ideals, but their memories as well. To this clear vision the Mogul supremacy was but an interregnum in the con-

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tinuity of Indian national life. Akbar was Hindu in breadth of vision and boldness of synthesis. Was not the Tāj, in his mind, a Shakuntalā in marble? 'The songs of Guru Nānak alternated with those of Mirābāi and Tānsen on his lips. Stories of Prithvi Rāj and Delhi jostled against those of Chitore and Pratāp Singh, Shiva and Umā, Rādhā and Krishna, Sitā-Rām and Buddha. Each mighty drama lived in marvellous actuality when he was the player. His whole heart and soul was the burning epic of the country, touched to an overflow of mystic passion by her very name.'[1] He held in his hand all that was fundamental, organic, vital; he knew the secret springs of life. There was a fire in his breast, which entered into him with the comprehension of essential truths, the result of spiritual illumination. His great mind saw a connection where others saw only isolated facts; his mind pierced the soul of things and presented facts in their real order. His was the most universal mind, with a perfect practical culture. What better equipment could one have who was to represent before the Parliament of Religions India in its entirety—Vedic and Vedāntic, Buddhistic and Jaina, Shaivic and Vaishnavic, and even Mohammedan? Who else could be better fitted for this task than this disciple of one who was himself a Parliament of Religions in a true sense?"

And we may also quote from the concluding lines of the Introduction to *The Complete Works of Swāmi Vivekānanda* by Sister Niveditā: "These, then —the Shāstras, the Guru, and the motherland—are the three notes that mingle themselves to form the music of the works of Vivekānanda. These are the treasure which it is his to offer. These furnish him with the

[1] These lines are quoted from Sister Niveditā's article in the *Hindu*, dated July 23, 1902.

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ingredients whereof he compounds the world's heal-all of his spiritual bounty."

The ship rode majestically on the billows of the Pacific; every hour the dreamland of America approached nearer; and with this also came nearer to realisation the day of true understanding between the East and the West. Fully converted in mind and spirit, he was now to land on the shores of the new continent to invite the West to give up fighting and join him in a new struggle for harmonious progress as envisaged in his Master's life.

Swāmi Vivekānanda disembarked at Vancouver in the middle of July and reached Chicago by train—unnoticed, unrecognised and unintroduced. In actual fact, he was the only man going to the Parliament who could speak for Hinduism as a whole. Yet he had no invitation, no recommendation and no status as a representative. It did not take him long to find out that he could not be accepted as a delegate; besides, the Parliament would meet two months later, in September, and with the meagre resources he had, he would be facing starvation before the Parliament was in session. The Swāmi had felt the divine call, but lacked practical wisdom. And that was about to ruin his mission. As Sister Niveditā puts it: "The Swāmi himself was as simple in the ways of the world as these his disciples; and when he was once sure that he was divinely called to make the attempt, he could see no difficulties in the way. Nothing could have been more typical of the unorganisedness of Hinduism itself than this going forth of its representative unannounced, and without formal credentials, to enter the strongly guarded doors of the world's wealth and power" (*Life of Swāmi Vivekānanda*, p. 294).

But although disappointed, Swāmi Vivekānanda was not to be vanquished—such was his indomitable

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spirit. If the Parliament did not open its portals to him, would not the liberal-minded Americans listen to him? So he left Chicago for Boston, a cheaper place; and as he travelled and sought shelter, he found ready invitation almost everywhere, for "wherever Swāmiji went, he made news." So the pre-Parliament days were packed with talks and lectures in private and in public. Boston and the neighbouring places got a foretaste of the oratory, and brilliance of ideas of the Hindu monk, till through the good offices of Dr. John Henry Wright, Professor of Greek in the Harvard University, he found a seat among the delegates in the Parliament of Religions, opening on September 11. Swāmi Vivekānanda had no cause to regret these days of suspense before the opening of the Parliament. "Within three weeks Swāmiji had, as far as we now know, given eleven lectures and gained the respect of some of the leading minds of America. He had, moreover, come into contact with a cross section of American life. He had spoken to the Ramābāi Club; he had met members of the clergy, the inmates of a prison, the American club women, and had even talked with the children. He could not have had a better preparation for all that was to come." (*Swami Vivekananda in America: New Discoveries,* pp. 44-45).

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BURSTING FORTH

(1893—1897)

The Parliament opened in the morning of September 11 in the Hall of Columbus, at the Art Institute, a newly constructed permanent building on Chicago's Michigan Avenue, far away from the World's Fair ground, and not yet ready to house the art exhibits for which it was intended. When the "New Liberty Bell" at the Fair proclaimed the opening of the Parliament by ten solemn strokes, representing the ten principal religions listed by the President, Mr. Bonney—Judaism, Mohammedanism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shintoism, Zoroastrianism, Catholicism, the Greek Church and Protestantism—Cardinal Gibbons, the highest prelate of the Catholic Church in America, President Bonney and the representatives of the World's faiths entered slowly and majestically the back of the auditorium and marched down the central aisle to ascend the platform and take their seats, amidst wave upon wave of cheers. Then began hymns in which every voice in the hall—four thousand strong at a moderate estimate—joined; all this culminated in the Lord's prayer. The Parliament was in session; and seventeen days of speeches—morning, noon and evening—followed.

The first day was devoted to twenty-four speeches of welcome from the officials and short ones in reply by the delegates. As is well known, Swāmi Vivekānanda sat there silent and prayerful, putting off his turn every time, till there were but five speakers left including himself. About his feeling at the time he wrote later,

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"My heart was fluttering, and my tongue nearly dried up." This, although before embarking for America, he had said to his brother-disciple Swāmi Turiyānanda, "The Parliament of Religions is being organised for this (pointing to himself). My mind tells me so. You will see it verified at no distant time." And we have recorded the periods of earnest prayers, the elaborate preparations and the reverses of fortune he had to go through before he reached the Parliament. Yet, when the hour struck, he seemed to falter ; or was there some divine hand holding him back, waiting for the most propitious moment created by the failure of all others to rise to the expected dizzy height of universalism and the consequent eagerness of the vast audience to hear some one voicing the still unformulated message of the Parliament itself? Whatever mystic forces may have been at work on a higher plane, Swāmi Vivekānanda, according to his own confession, was nervous, and indeed such a vast gathering of intelligent faces in front, and the critical ears of the well-known representatives of the world at his sides on the platform, might well have produced stage-fright even in a practised orator. But he could not sit silent to the end.

At last the Swāmi "bowed down to Devi Saraswati," the goddess of learning, and stepped up to the rostrum. Dr. Barrows introduced him. The Swāmi then started with "Sisters and brothers of America." The effect was electrical ; the whole audience stood up to a man, cheering and waving wildly for minutes.[1] Something had touched their hearts that had not as yet been fully expressed in words. Earlier than this, when the Archbishop of Zante, representing the Greek Church, had finished with high sentiments, and President Bonney

[1] "When Mr. Vivekananda addressed the audience as 'Sisters and Brothers of America,' there arose a peal of applause that lasted for several minutes." Barrows and Houghton, quoted in *Swami Vivekananda in America : New Discoveries,* p. 57.

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had commented, "This is indeed glorious," the audience had lustily cheered the Archbishop. Mazumdar of the Brāhmo Samāj, who was previously known to many, had also had his share of applause. Pung Kwang Yu, the Confucian from China, drew thundering expressions of welcome, because the President had remarked, "We have not treated China very well in this country." Others too had been cheered, for different reasons—"political or religious sympathy, previous knowledge of the speaker, or atonement for national sin." But in Vivekānanda's case it was not any of these, not even his declaration of universal brotherhood—fine though it was, being clothed in simple homely words, intelligible even to a child—that thrilled the audience; but it was rather the inspiration he conveyed—an actuality that touched their hearts and fused them all into a common humanity. It was as if the Parliament had been convened just for this supreme moment. It was Vivekānanda's communication of spirituality to the West. When the audience again settled down to hear him, it was the ancient nation of India extending its hand of spiritual brotherhood to the new nation of America through a short speech of the Swāmi, from whose lips every word fell like nectar saturated with intense feeling that went straight to the heart. The Swāmi said that he belonged to the most ancient order of monks, and that he was proud of the tolerance, nay, universal acceptance taught by his religion, and practised by his nation, and he fervently hoped that the bell that tolled that morning in honour of that convention might be the "death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal." It was palpable even to the dullest intellect that Vivekānanda's universalism was a felt reality, and that his call to brotherhood and plea

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for tolerance, co-operation and mutual respect were not sounded in the name of any one religion, but in the name of all religions. Quotations from the scriptures and references to historical actualities proved that these were not idle fancies, but the reiteration of beliefs concretised in a whole nation's life. Vivekānanda's oratory, his personality, his spiritual affiliation and his sanguine temperament marked him off at once as the most popular and outstanding representative. Whenever the tedious proceedings made the audience restive, the Chairman had simply to announce that Swāmi Vivekānanda would be the last speaker, and he would have the whole audience waiting patiently in that hot weather till the last moment, just to hear a few words from the hero of the Parliament. From the fifth day was opened the Scientific Section of the Parliament, at which Swāmiji spoke several times, and, it can be safely guessed, with equal attractiveness.

The success of Swāmiji was all the more noteworthy when we consider the adverse forces marshalled behind the Parliament itself. "The idea of a series of congresses for the consideration of the greatest themes in which mankind is interested, and so comprehensive as to include representatives from all parts of the earth, originated with Charles Carrot Bonney in the summer of 1889."[1] Bonney was a well-known, liberal-minded lawyer of the time. But despite the fact that his motive was above suspicion, not all connected with the organisation of the Parliament were so altruistically inspired. Regarding the form the Parliament took, the way it was conducted, and the sentiments that found expression in it, Swāmi Vivekānanda was constrained to write, "The Parliament of Religions was organised with the intention of proving the superiority of the Christian

[1] Quoted from Neely's *History of the Parliament of Religions* in *Swami Vivekananda in America : New Discoveries,* p. 46.

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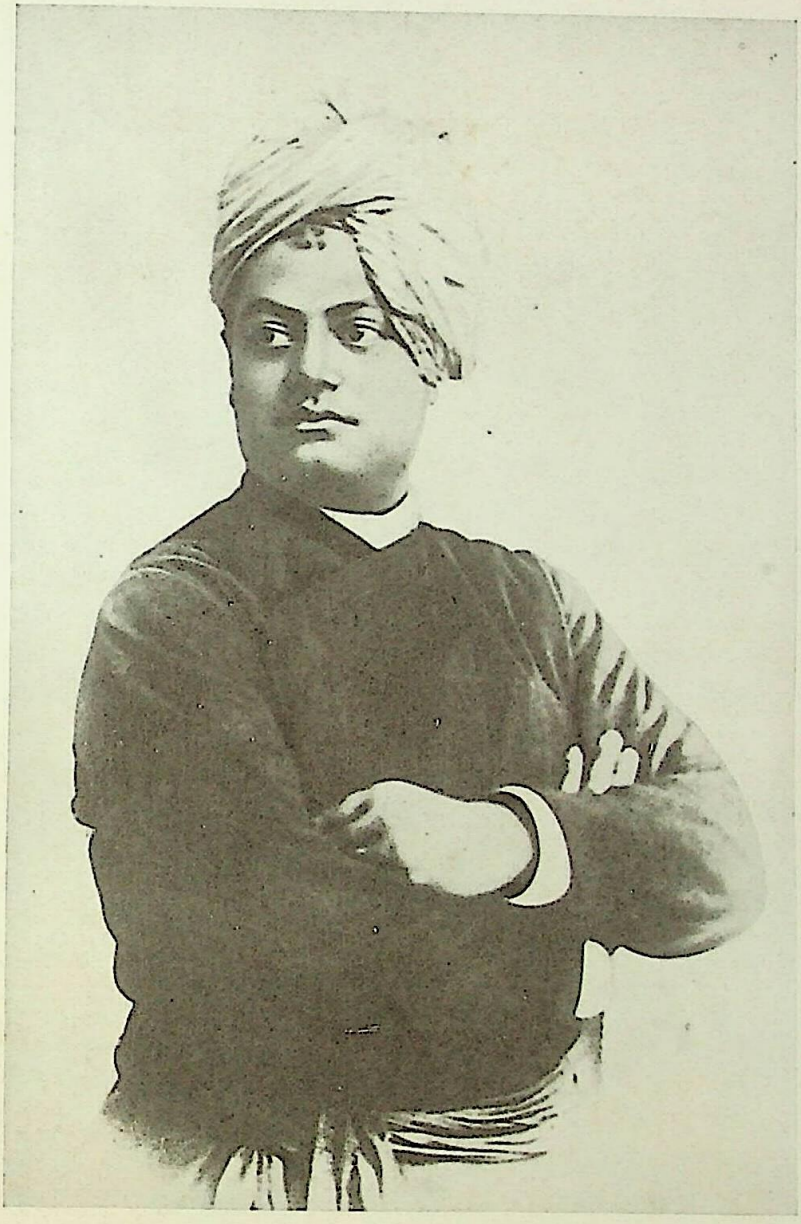

Swāmi Vivekānanda
(1863—1902)

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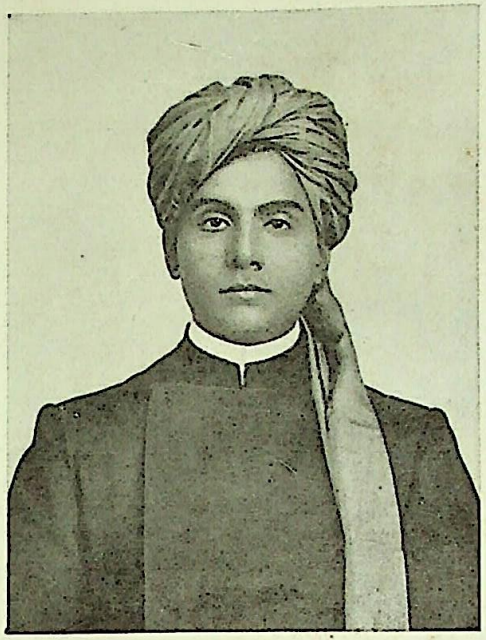
SWĀMI SĀRADĀNANDA
(1865—1927)



SWĀMI ABHEDĀNANDA
(1866—1939)

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religion over other forms of faith." And during the course of an interview he remarked, "The Parliament of Religions, as it seems to me, was intended for a 'heathen show' before the world; . . ." Remarks the American writer of *Swami Vivekananda in America: New Discoveries* (pp. 47-48), "It has sometimes been thought that Swāmiji may have been unfair in this judgment of the Congress which introduced him to the Western world, but a reading of the accounts of both the preparations and the proceedings leaves one without a doubt that the Parliament was permeated with Christian prejudice. That Christianity would gloriously and unequivocally prove its superiority was a foregone conclusion in the minds of many of its promoters. . . . But although it was Bonney's inspiration that lay behind the Parliament, it was actually not he, but the Rev. John Henry Barrows, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Chicago, who was Chairman of the General Committee and responsible for carrying out the elaborate preparations." Patronisation was taken for enlightened brotherly love. And this conclusion is best attested by the words of Dr. Barrows himself: "We believe that Christianity is to supplant all other religions, because it contains all the truth there is in them and much besides, revealing a redeeming God. . . . Though light has no fellowship with darkness, light does have fellowship with twilight. God has not left himself without witness, and those who have the full light of the Cross should bear brotherly hearts toward all who grope in a dimmer illumination." Without going into this aspect of the question in more detail, we can pass to other considerations with the remark that though Barrows and his compeers would have very much liked to strut on the platform of the Parliament with their wonted clerical superciliousness, the clergy did not represent the whole of America; for, had this

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been so, the tremendous success of Swāmi Vivekānanda in the pre-Parliament, Parliament and post-Parliament days would remain inexplicable. The Americans were better than interested people thought them to be.

Swāmiji's work at the Parliament had its beneficial result not only for America, but for Hinduism also. Giving an analytical appreciation of Swāmiji, Sister Niveditā writes in her introduction to *The Complete Works of Swāmi Vivekānanda,* "What Hinduism needed amidst the general disintegration of the modern era, was a rock where she could lie at anchor, an authoritative utterance in what she might recognise her self. . . . What the world had needed was a faith that had no fear of truth. . . . Of the Swāmi's address before the Parliament of Religions, it may be said that when he began to speak, it was of 'the religious ideas of the Hindus,' but when he ended, Hinduism had been created." In Swāmi Vivekānanda, standing on the platform of the Parliament, met two thought currents of the hoary, quiescent East and the bubbling, enthusiastic West—both working in their own way to bring a new brotherhood into being. "The formulation of the Common Bases of Hinduism was the inevitable result of the shock of their contact, in a personality so impersonal. . . . For India herself, the short address forms . . . a brief Charter of Enfranchisement." In the light of the new vision he ushered in, is to be understood his conception of the Vedic knowledge, as contained in the declaration, "By the Vedas no books are meant. They mean the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by different persons in different times ("Paper on Hinduism"). And in his wide definition of the Sanātana Dharma (Perennial Religion) all creeds find ample room: "From the high spiritual flights of the Vedānta philosophy, of which the latest discoveries of science seem like echoes, to the lowest ideas of idolatry with its multifarious

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mythology, the agnosticism of the Buddhists and the atheism of the Jains, each and all have a place in the Hindu's religion" (*ibid.*). And yet each man has the right to stick to his own particular faith, while honouring all others and co-operating for the common advancement of humanity; for "unity in variety is the plan of nature." Besides, "man is not travelling from error to truth, . . . but from lower truth to higher truth." Men are divine by nature; they are not sinners, but "children of immortal bliss." The religion of the Hindus "does not consist in struggles and attempts to believe a certain dogma, but in realising—not in believing, but in being and becoming" (*ibid.*). The future universal religion "will be a religion which will have no place for persecution or intolerance in its polity, which will recognise divinity in every man and woman, and whose whole scope, whose whole force, will be centred in aiding humanity to realise its own true divine nature" (*ibid.*). Swāmiji's speech on "Religion not the Crying Need of India" exposed the hollowness of the missionary activities and stated the purpose of his visit to America: "I came here to seek aid for my impoverished people." At the last session, Swāmiji ended his farewell address on the optimistic note: "Upon the banner of every religion will soon be written . . . 'Help and not fight,' 'Assimilation and not destruction,' 'Harmony and Peace and not Dissension.' "

Dr. Annie Besant, recollecting her impression of Swāmiji's presence and performance at the Parliament wrote long after: "The dignity and inborn sense of worth and power still were there, but all was subdued to the exquisite beauty of the spiritual message which he had brought, to the sublimity of that matchless evangel of the East which is the heart, the life of India, the wondrous teaching of the Self. Enraptured, the huge multitude hung upon his words; not a syllable

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must be lost, not a cadence missed! 'That man a heathen!' said one, as he came out of the great hall, 'and we send missionaries to his people! It would be more fitting that they should send missionaries to us!'" (*Brahmavādin,* March-April, 1914, p. 88.)

Two results followed instantaneously. Swāmi Vivekānanda became a world figure, and along with this the prestige of India and Hinduism rose very high. Secondly, his success created jealousy among most of the Christian missionaries, and even among some of his own countrymen who represented other forms of religion at the Parliament. Thus the Swāmi had to pay dearly for this popularity. On the one side, there were his calumniators, and on the other, his whirlwind lecture tours which left him no rest. We may leave alone the detractors, though they damaged his reputation and hindered his work a great deal; and we need not say much about the immensity of his work of preaching to impress on the reader how seriously he took upon himself the task of serving his country in this indirect way, at the same time that he roused the American mind to a sense of higher spiritual values, and the Western sense of justice to a condemnation of the oppression to which India was subjected. By his rapid movements and soul-stirring speeches he earned the appellations of the "cyclonic Hindu" and the "lightning orator"—but this at the cost of his health. Leaving aside the volume of lectures and writings he turned out, we shall rather pass on to the kind of work that he undertook in America, and the direction he gave to it. Readers interested in his actual teachings may refer to his letters and lectures in the pages of his *Complete Works,* as well as to his biographies.

Swāmi Vivekānanda is often referred to in India as a patriot-saint with the emphasis on the first word; nay, some would present him as a nation-builder, a

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socialist and what not. Whatever may have been his role in India, and we shall return to a consideration of this more than once in proper places, it goes without saying that the burden of his talks in America was predominantly spiritual. True it is that at times he spoke of the social institutions and cultural forms obtaining in India, nay, he even lashed out at the oppressive English and castigated the misguided missionaries; but this was because he had to substantiate his claim that the Hindus were not mere visionaries, since they translated their spiritual theories into practical social life; and he had to remove the Western prejudices that barred the way of his spiritual message. To be sure, he often hinted at the financial motive of his visit: he wanted money from America to serve his country, and that was what brought him across the seas. But one should not over-emphasise these aspects of his life, speeches and writings. Pertinently enough, the author already referred to, of *Swami Vivekananda in America: New Discoveries,* writes: "Quite literally he planted the seeds of spirituality deep in the hearts of innumerable human beings, changing the course of their lives for ever. So spontaneously and naturally did Swāmiji do this that it is possible he himself was not aware of it. But such unawareness has always characterized prophets and saviors—just as it characterizes the sun, which does not deliberate upon whether or not it shall shine. . . . Possibly even many of those who received them were at the time not conscious of it, for blessings often work in secret though inexorable ways. Thus although the outer purpose of Swāmiji's tour was to collect funds for India, to spread a true knowledge of her culture and religion and combat the slander perpetrated against her, his deeper purpose was to fulfil the divine function of a prophet among the people of the Western world, mingling with as many as possible and blessing all. We

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in America believe that it was this which formed the true substance and inner strength of Swāmiji's mission to the West, and we believe that America has been divinely favored" (p. 337).

As early as December 28, 1893, Swāmiji wrote in a letter, "As regards spirituality, the Americans are far inferior to us, but their society is far superior to ours. We will teach them our spirituality and assimilate what is best in their society." And in March 19, 1894, he wrote in another letter, "I give them spirituality, and they give me money." Such emphatic assertions do not leave any shadow of doubt that whatever his motive might have been in the Indian context, so far as America was concerned, he taught spirituality alone. So far as India is concerned, here also his intention was far from political. When his occasional talks on secular subjects gave a handle to others to slander him in India, he wrote back (on September 27, 1894), "I am no politician or political agitator. I care only for the spirit; when that is right, everything will be righted by itself. . . . So you must warn the Calcutta people that no political significance be ever attached falsely to any of my writings or sayings. What nonsense! . . . I heard that Rev. Kāli Charan Banerji in a lecture to Christian missionaries said that I was a political delegate. If it was said publicly, then publicly ask the Babu from me, to write to any of the Calcutta papers and prove it, or else take back his foolish assertion. This is their trick! I have said a few harsh words in honest criticism of Christian Governments in general; but that does not mean that I care for, or have any connection with politics or that sort of thing. Those who think it very grand to print extracts from those lectures, and want to prove that I am a political preacher, to them I say, 'Save me from my friends.'" Nothing need be added to this spirited and unequivocal repudiation of his political affiliation. Nor

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was he in favour of starting reform movements. He wrote in 1895, "Meddle not with so-called social reform, for there cannot be any reform without spiritual reform first" (*Complete Works,* V, p. 59).

As for the monetary consideration and the general state of his mind at the time, a few excerpts from the letters of the period should disarm all crude suspicion. The letter just quoted concluded with the following lines: "This nonsense of public life and newspaper blazoning has disgusted me thoroughly. I long to go back to the Himalayan quiet." In 1894 he writes, "Money can be raised in this country by lecturing for two or three years. But I have tried a little, and although there is much public appreciation of my work, it is thoroughly uncongenial and demoralising to me" (*Complete Works,* V, p. 43). And on August 31, 1894, "You know the greatest difficulty with me is to keep or even to touch money. It is disgusting and debasing. So you must organise a society to take charge of the practical and pecuniary part of it." In a letter of February 15, 1895, we have, "Again, according to Manu, collecting funds even for a good work is not good for a Sannyāsin ; and I have begun to feel that the old sages were right." If he still collected money, though not with equal zest, it was because circumstances demanded this of him without offering him any effective alternative for the fulfilment of his mission.

What with this disgust for collecting money and delivering lectures incessantly at the rate of fourteen or more per week in the eastern and mid-western States of America, and what with his eagerness to settle down to more intensive and permanent spiritual ministration according to the time-honoured system in India, we find the Swāmi concentrating more and more on writing books and conducting group studies in New York without any financial consideration. Before this

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he had done some intensive work at the "Greenacre Conference" during the mid-summer months of 1894, where before a small number of eager students, sitting under trees in Oriental fashion, the Swāmi expounded the philosophy of the Upanishads. But what "constituted the real beginning of the Swāmi's work in America," in the estimation of his biographers, was the series of lectures and class talks on the Hindu Religion that he delivered before the Brooklyn Ethical Society from December 31, 1894. After this, he established his own quarters in New York—just an ordinary room on the second floor of a lodging house. As Sister Haridāsi puts it, "The Swāmi gave his services free as air. The rent was paid by voluntary subscriptions, and when these were found insufficient, the Swāmi hired a hall and gave secular lectures on India and devoted the proceeds to the maintenance of the classes. He said that Hindu teachers of religion felt it to be their duty to support their classes and their students" (*Life of Swāmi Vivekānanda,* p. 338). The classes began in February, 1895, and lasted till June. But in the interval the attendance had so increased that an entire parlour floor and extension, downstairs, had to be engaged. Through his talks, lectures, answers to questions and meditation classes, he sought at this time strenuously to build up a group of disciples who could ensure a permanent foothold for Vedānta in America. The Swāmi's work in New York now chiefly comprised talks on Jñāna-Yoga and Rāja-Yoga, supplemented by those on Bhakti-Yoga and practical lessons on Rāja-Yoga. He also set about writing his masterly work on Rāja-Yoga, completing it in June, 1895.

About this time he initiated into Sannyāsa Madame Marie Louise and Herr Leon Landsberg—the former by birth a French-woman and the latter a Russian Jew—who now became Swāmi Abhayānanda

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and Swāmi Kripānanda respectively. These two proved later to be unhappy choices; but the Swāmi never regretted his misplaced confidence, nor did he condemn them for their defection. Besides, though this was in a way symbolical of what he aimed at, his success cannot be gauged by the ultimate reaction of these two souls alone. For by this time he had won for ever the active friendship of a large number of Americans and Europeans, among whom were Mrs. Ole Bull, Miss S. E. Waldo (Haridāsi), Dr. Lewis Janes, Profs. James, Wyman and Wright, Dr. Street, Mr. and Mrs. Francis Leggett, Miss MacLeod, Nicolas Tesla, Sarah Bernhardt, Madame Calvé, and the Hale family. His work was now a success, which he too felt and told others. And this was mainly traceable to his identification with the people. He wrote, "I do not care whether they are Hindus or Mohammedans or Christians, but those that love the Lord will always command my service." And "India's doom was sealed the very day they invented the word Mlechchha and stopped communion with others." The Americans were not only his friends, admirers and disciples, but he addressed some of them as "Mother," some as "Father," while others were his sisters and brothers, just in the Indian way and with the same depth of feeling. They too reciprocated the sentiments, thus greatly helping him in his work, adding to his mental composure and providing a smooth vehicle for the transmission of his ideas.

When the work in New York had been placed on a solid basis, the Swāmi received an invitation from Miss Henrietta Müller to visit London as a missionary of Hinduism and be her guest. Coming to know of this, Mr. E. T. Sturdy also extended an invitation to stay with him. This gentleman was a Theosophist, with great respect for Hinduism and the Hindu mode of life. While engaged in spiritual quest in the solitude

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of the Himālayas at Almorā, India, he had come into intimate contact with Swāmi Shivānanda, who was then spending his days in austerity and meditation in search of God at a near-by place, and by whom he was introduced to Shri Rāmakrishna, Swāmi Vivekānanda and Vedānta. So after his return to London, his mind naturally turned to Vivekānanda for personal instruction, as also for the propagation of Hindu ideas. Swāmi Vivekānanda, on his part, thought this to be a good opportunity for extending his activities to Europe. But before he proceeded there, he wanted to consolidate his American work still further by giving an intensive course of training to a select group of students. Moreover, his exhausted body and mind required rest after ceaseless and exacting work for two years. Accordingly, a retreat was selected at Thousand Island Park, a beautiful island in the St. Lawrence River, where he went in the middle of June, 1895, and taught an earnest group of twelve students, ten being the maximum attendance at any time. The Swāmi was in a deep spiritual mood here, and his talks issued direct from the depths of realisation. These have been recorded and published as *Inspired Talks,* and inspired and inspiring they are through and through. These talks started from June 19, and continued till the Swāmi left the place on August 7.

After returning to New York, the Swāmi got ready to go to England via Paris. Reaching London early in September, he became the guest of Mr. Sturdy and commenced work almost immediately, meeting with success even greater than in America, and much beyond his own expectation. He wrote in November, "In England my work is really splendid." But high as was the appreciation of his talks and lectures, even higher was his achievement in winning as a disciple Miss Margaret E. Noble, a talented, young Irish educa-

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tionist, who afterwards dedicated her life to her Master's cause and became known as Niveditā, the dedicated one.

In England Swāmi Vivekānanda's feeling was that, though the work had started excellently, it required sustained effort to make it enduring and effective, which he was not then in a position to put forth, inasmuch as his American work claimed his first attention. Accordingly he wrote to the Ālambāzār brotherhood to spare a monk to work in London in co-operation with Mr. Sturdy. His first choice was Swāmi Rāmakrishnānanda. But as the Swāmi was not physically strong enough, the next choice was Swāmi Sāradānanda, who, however, could not reach London earlier than April 1, 1896, so that Swāmi Vivekānanda had to leave for New York without waiting for him, and arrived there on December 6, 1895.

During Swāmiji's absence in England, the New York work was being carried on successfully by Swāmis Kripānanda and Abhayānanda with the assistance of Miss S. E. Waldo. Now, with his arrival the work progressed with redoubled force. But as many of his valuable utterances were being lost for want of a shorthand writer fast enough for him, the Swāmi's admirers engaged the services of J. J. Goodwin, a young Englishman, who was soon so fascinated by the new thoughts he transcribed that he became a disciple, and claimed no monetary reward for his labour of love. This was a distinct gain, since the Swāmi had no time to take up the pen to put down his thoughts systematically for the benefit of future generations. It was thus that at this time were recorded the lectures which came out in book form as *Bhakti-Yoga, My Master* and *Karma-Yoga.* The *Jnāna-Yoga* lectures too were really recorded then, though published later along with earlier ones on the subject. On February 13, 1896,

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Dr. Street took orders to become Swami Yogānanda. Closing his work in New York in due course, the Swāmi diverted his attention to other places—Detroit and Cambridge, for instance—during March. Through these lectures, discourses and class talks, the Swāmi was not merely quickening the spiritual consciousness of his hearers, disseminating Vedāntic ideas for the Western people and demonstrating by his personal example the dynamic Hinduism that he wanted to bring into being; he was at the same time systematising Hinduism itself. And here, again, one can hear the distant rumblings of that marvellous philosophy of practical Vedānta or Vedāntic ideals reduced to practice, that the great Swāmi would be preaching with a thunderous voice in the near future from Colombo to Almorā during his triumphal march through India. That was a part of his mission, as he had written long before to one of his disciples: "To put the Hindu ideas into English and then make out of dry philosophy and intricate mythology and queer, startling psychology a religion which shall be easy, simple, popular, and at the same time meet the requirements of the highest minds—is a task which only those can understand who have attempted it. The abstract Advaita must become living, poetic, in everyday life; out of hopelessly intricate mythology must come concrete moral forms; and out of bewildering Yogism must come the most scientific and practical psychology—and all this must be put in a form that a child may grasp. That is my life's work." Speaking before the London public on November 10, 1896, he said, "The Vedānta as a religion must be intensely practical. . . . The ideals of religion must cover the whole field of life, they must enter into all our thoughts, and more and more into practice." And long ago, in 1894, he had written, "What India wants is a new electric fire to stir up fresh vigour in the national veins" (*Complete Works*, V, p. 44).

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But to return to America. When Swāmiji was in the midst of his Herculean task, holding discourses and delivering lectures sometimes numbering seventeen per week, London was insistent in her call for him to come and take care of the unfinished work. The Swāmi felt the urgency of this and started to prepare accordingly. He bestowed on Miss Waldo, now called Haridāsi, the power and authority to teach the practice and philosophy of Rāja-Yoga. And there were others to take up other departments of work. He also brought into being in February, 1896, a Vedānta Society in New York[1] with Mr. Francis H. Leggett as President, and other initiated disciples of his as office-bearers. Having thus set things in order, he sailed for London on April 15.

Back in London, the Swāmi resumed in right earnest his work of lecturing and assisting Mr. Sturdy in writing books. During this stay he cultivated the friendship of the great Orientalist Prof. Max Müller, who first wrote an article on Shri Rāmakrishna in the *Nineteenth Century,* entitled *A Real Mahatman,* and then a masterly biography called *Ramakrishna : His Life and Sayings,* for which Swāmi Vivekānanda had supplied the necessary materials with the help of Swāmi Sāradānanda. Another tangible result was the acceptance of the Swāmi's discipleship by Mr. Sturdy and Mr. and Mrs. Sevier. With success thus assured in London, it was now high time to look back across the Atlantic, where the demand for a Swāmi was persistent. So at the end of June Swāmi Sāradānanda was sent there with Goodwin.

Exhausted with the work, Swāmi Vivekānanda now needed rest. So his friends planned to take him to the

[1] See *Brahmavādin,* Vol. I, p. 207. Some organisation with office-bearers had been started by November, 1894. But no particulars of it or its activities are available. It seems to have been something different from the Vedānta Society.

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Continent, for which he started at the end of July with the Seviers and Miss Henrietta Müller. Swāmiji visited Switzerland in particular and returned to London on September 17, via Kiel, meeting there the well-known philosopher Paul Deussen, who later joined him at Hamburg and proceeded with him to London to enjoy his company.

When planning to send Sāradānanda to America, Swāmi Vivekānanda had foreseen the need of a Swāmi in London. Accordingly he wanted one from Ālambāzār, and by common consent Swāmi Abhedānanda was chosen. He arrived in London in September, after Swāmi Vivekānanda had finished his Continental tour. Swāmiji's task now was to induce the new Swāmi to take the platform in his stead. This was easily done. Swāmi Abhedānanda's maiden speech pleased all concerned so much that the leader now felt sure that even in his absence the London work would be in able hands. The reports of Swāmi Sāradānanda's work were equally heartening. He had talked at the Greenacre Conference and then in Boston, Brooklyn and New York, meeting with high appreciation at every place. After this successful *debut,* Swāmi Sāradānanda settled down in New York to carry on the Vedānta movement in an organised way.

Thus relieved of anxieties for the work in London and New York, Swāmi Vivekānanda's mind now turned definitely to India. At this time he began to talk and write about his plans for the work in India to intimate friends and disciples like the Seviers and Mrs. Bull. Mrs. Bull in response expressed her readiness to help the Indian work with money, which, however the Swāmi could not accept just then. In November he completed his plans, and hurried preparations were made for his departure on December 16, along with the Seviers and

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Mr. Goodwin. The party was to arrive at Colombo on January 15, 1897.

Preparatory to following Swāmiji in his footsteps along the high roads of India, we shall be well advised to take a rapid glance at the state of affairs in India in general and at Ālambāzār and Madras in particular—a state of affairs which he had brought about through his letters and lectures, circulated privately and publicly, and read by all with avidity.

What was the repercussion of Swāmi Vivekānanda's success on that old native land of his? The effect was tremendous. So far as the mental attitude of the nation was concerned, it was turned overnight from one of despondence to youthful buoyancy. In a word, India was awakened, never to sleep again, though she had still to be started on the way to a new successful career of spiritual and social rejuvenation. The Indian public literally devoured every quotation from the Swāmi and all reports of his unparalleled triumph. The people of Madras and Bengal were transported with joy, the papers and journals were full of Vivekānanda, and large and influential meetings were held to draft congratulations to the redeemer of the Hindu faith and the vindicator of his nation's prestige. Of these meetings, those in Madras and Calcutta, the latter on September 5, 1894, were most noteworthy. To these the Swāmi sent suitable replies packed with hints for future action.

As for the brotherhood at Ālambāzār, though they could not at first clearly recognise their Naren in the Swāmi Vivekānanda of American fame, they were naturally proud of this Hindu monk ; and when a letter from him, months later, set all doubts at rest, their elation knew no bounds. Had not the Master prophesied, "Naren shall shake the world to its foundations!"

Born leader that he was, Swāmi Vivekānanda was careful not to allow this enthusiasm to spend itself in

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sentimental outbursts; rather he was eager to direct it into useful and constructive channels. And as his work in the West was being consolidated, he also tried to usher in various types of permanent work in India through correspondence. His friends and disciples in India were also eager for his leadership; they even requested him to return to India soon after his initial triumph in Chicago. But he persistently resisted the temptation; for he knew better that, though India had to be roused and rebuilt, the country lacked money, and that the rousing itself was dependent on his success in the new continent, as he wrote on September 29, 1894, "Our field is India, and the value of foreign appreciation is in rousing India up." Again on October 27, 1894, he wrote, "Everybody wants me to come over to India. They think we shall be able to do more if I come over. They are mistaken, my friend. The present enthusiasm is only a little patriotism; it means nothing. If it is true and genuine, you will find in a short time hundreds of heroes coming forward and carrying on the work." In another letter written in the same year, he decided the issue thus: "My little work here makes a big echo in India, do you know? So I shall not return there in a hurry. My intention is to do something here permanently, and with that object I am working day by day" (*Complete Works*, V, p. 49).

As yet Swāmi Vivekānanda had not worked out any detailed plan of his Indian project, though the broad outlines were there to convince even the casual thinker that something grand and unique was in the making. He himself knew that the task to which he was addressing himself was stupendous, and that its fulfilment might take generations. But nothing less magnificent could capture Vivekānanda's imagination, nor could his mind visualise a less noble destiny for his

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beloved country. Mentally he was engaged in preparing a blueprint for this scheme of national reconstruction, as is evident from a letter written on August 20, 1893, where he says, "A hundred thousand men and women, fired with the zeal of holiness, fortified with eternal faith in the Lord, and nerved to lion's courage by their sympathy for the poor and the fallen and the downtrodden, . . . will go over the length and breadth of the land, preaching the gospel of salvation, the gospel of help, the gospel of social raising up—the gospel of Equality." For training this army of spiritual regenerators, he often referred to a central theological college to be opened at Madras. But these trained bearers of the new message of uplift were not to arrogate to themselves the role of saviours, for people were to save themselves. He wrote, "My whole ambition in life is to set in motion a machinery which will bring noble ideas to the door of everybody, and then let men and women settle their own fate. . . . We are to put the chemicals together, the crystallisation will be done by nature according to her laws." He warned his workers: "Keep the motto before you—'Elevation of the masses without injuring their religion.' . . . Can you give them back their lost individuality without making them lose their innate spiritual nature? Can you become an Occidental of Occidentals in your spirit of equality, freedom, work and energy, and at the same time a Hindu to the very backbone in religious culture and instincts?" (January 24, 1894). The vehicle of this national reinvigoration was to be national education: "We must have the whole education of our country, spiritual and secular, in our own hands, and it must be on national lines, through national methods as far as practical" (*Complete Works*, III, p. 302). In his philosophy, self-help was needed both as an individual and national policy: "You must not depend on any

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foreign help. Nations, like individuals, must help themselves. . . . If a nation cannot do that, its time has not yet come. It must wait" (July 14, 1894). "Every nation, every man and every woman must work out their own salvation. Give them ideas—that is the only help they require—and then the rest will follow as the effect" (June 23, 1895 ; *Complete Works,* IV, p. 362). But that did not mean that international co-operation was to be eliminated: "I am thoroughly convinced that no individual or nation can live by holding itself apart from the community of others, and whenever such an attempt has been made under false ideas of greatness, policy or holiness—the result has always been disastrous to the secluding one" (November 18, 1894 ; *Complete Works,* IV, p. 365). We are to give as well as take from others. We should give our ancient spirituality and culture and get in return Western science, technology, methods of raising the standard of life, business integrity and technique of collective effort. The basis of resurgence must be religion. But by religion he did not mean the parody of it that we often meet with in society. "Don't-touchism," for instance, he warned his countrymen, "is a form of mental disease. Beware!" (*Complete Works,* VI, p. 322). On September 29, 1894, he wrote in defence of the true Hindu religion, "I claim that no destruction of religion is necessary to improve the Hindu society, and that this state of society exists not on account of religion, but because that religion has not been applied to society as it should have been" (*Complete Works,* V, p. 37). Our spirituality is all-inclusive, but our society is narrow in its outlook. For India's betterment both must be equally liberal, for "Expansion is life, contraction is death" (*Complete Works,* IV, p. 366). Yet he cautioned all, "Do not figure out big plans at first, but begin slowly. Feel your ground and proceed up and up" (March 6, 1895). He was never tired of insisting

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on raising the status of the masses and women. According to him, India's degeneration was due to the suppression of such large sections of humanity. They must be raised to equality with the help of education based on religion. And along with this, caste must be placed on its original foundation of traits and not birth. Through that stress on traits, the lower castes must be raised to brahminhood, not the brahmins degraded to Sudrahood. He wrote on April 9, 1894, "I believe that the Satya-Yuga will come when there will be one caste, one Veda, and peace and harmony. This idea of Satya-Yuga is what would revivify India. . . . Old Hinduism for ever! . . . Up, up, my boys, we are sure to win."

These, then, are the ideas in brief that Swāmi Vivekānanda wanted to work out in the broader field of India. Preparatory to that, he communicated his directions to his immediate followers of Madras, and the brotherhood at Ālambāzār. He encouraged his Madras disciples to be more organised and businesslike in their actions. Among these may be mentioned Alasinga Perumāl, G. Venkataranga Rāo and M. C. Nanjunda Rāo, to whom he sent money for running a journal called the *Brahmavādin,* which they started on September 14, 1895. The prospectus of the journal, issued by the trio, read thus: "Under the advice and with the encouragement of Swāmi Vivekānanda, it is proposed to start a weekly journal to be named the *Brahmavādin.*" The original idea of making it a weekly was, however, waived in favour of a fortnightly. The Swāmi helped it with articles and by securing subscribers in the West. With this enthusiastic group he maintained his contact through correspondence. "Learn business, my boy," he wrote to Alasinga on July 11, 1894. "The faculty of organisation is entirely absent in our nature ; but this has to be infused." Again on

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August 31, 1894, he wrote to him, "Now, organise a little society"; and on November 30, "We must organise our forces in the business part of our religious body, but on religious matters must strive not to make a sect." How impatiently he remarked on January 11, 1895, "Now do not talk; work, work, work! I do not see anything permanent you have done in India; I do not see any centre you have made; I do no see any temple or hall you have erected; I do not see anybody joining hands with you." All this had to wait for his arrival to take shape. In the meantime he went on keeping their spirits up and formulating his principles for propagation through the pages of the *Brahmavādin*.

The problems with his brother-disciples were somewhat the same, with this difference that with them he could be more exacting in urging them to concrete achievements. Besides, they had two advantages—they were already organised in a way; at the same time they had no family encumbrances and social handicaps. But they had not as yet realised fully the deeper, practical implications of Shri Rāmakrishna's advent. They were apt to move in the traditional grooves alone. In Vivekānanda's master-plan, Sannyāsins were to be the vanguard of the new upsurge. The Buddhists had made the mistake of opening the monastic institution to all and sundry, and sapping the vitality of the nation by an undue emphasis on other-worldliness. To remedy this evil, latter-day saints had preached the message of "work and worship." While accepting this, Vivekānanda formulated the more dynamic message of "Work is worship." Said he, "When work will become worship—nay, something higher—then will work be done for its own sake" (*Complete Works*, I, p. 64). This was something revolutionary. To make the other-worldly monks serve the world, and to make the so-called world-negating Vedānta philosophy serve as a vantage ground for inaug-

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urating philanthropic activity, were tasks to which only a Vivekānanda could address himself. To win over his brother-disciples to a new mode of thinking and acting; to redirect their beliefs according to new conclusions based on the Master's life and teachings—such were the tasks that Swāmi Vivekānanda set himself. We shall see that this was an uphill work.

To complicate matters still further, he had to convince the people of India that though this was a "non-sectarian sect," it had some unique contributions to make in furtherance of the old trends of Hindu thought—contributions which justified the setting up of new institutions under a new nomenclature. The conflict was really between conservatism and liberalism, revolving round the old and new methods of approach. In order to understand the kind of Gordian knot that Swāmiji was called upon to untie, let us take for example the apparently simple problem of preaching Shri Rāmakrishna's gospel. The situation was such that public utterance and private faith seemed perforce to be at variance.

To Alasinga Perumāl he wrote on March 6, 1895, "You need not insist upon preaching Shri Rāmakrishna. Propagate his ideas first, though I know the world always wants the man first." Leaving aside his personal predilection, one can easily understand the anxiety of the leader in Swāmiji to emphasise the principles rather than the person. For he was aiming at public good rather than personal benefit. True it is that the Master was not simply an assemblage of principles, but something over and above them. Swāmiji himself had been a party to his worship at the Barnagore Math. He also believed that the Master would soon be worshipped by innumerable others, and he was ready to justify this worship, as he did in a letter to Haridās Vihāridās Desāi in January, 1894, where he writes, "Man cannot go

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beyond his nature, no more than you can jump out of your body. What harm is there in some people worshipping their Guru when that Guru was a hundred times more holy than even your historical prophets all taken together?" Swāmi Vivekānanda's profession of faith in the Master is seen almost at its strongest in this letter; and yet, even if the brotherhood had read it, which in fact they never did, the approach would have seemed to them a little hesitant. Why could he not, they would have asked, declare the Master outright as the Prophet of the Age? And though they did not read this letter, they probably did read his letters to Madras, since according to his general instruction these were often sent to Ālambāzār for the information of the monks there. Again, his lectures in America, appearing in the newspapers, did not quite come up to their expectation. While marvelling at the breadth of his vision and his power of understanding Hinduism, they noted with dismay that he seldom spoke about the Master, much less mention his prophethood. As a result of all this, there were some in the brotherhood who were critical of this part of his performance, although they were ever ready to follow him.

This conflict between private and public beliefs and approaches was equally in evidence in other fields. The monastery, for instance, required some justification to the public, which could not understand either its necessity or some of its exotic features. Accordingly, on June 20, 1894, Swāmiji had to write to Mr. Desāi, "Every new religious wave requires a new centre. The old religion can only be revivified by a new centre. Hang your dogmas or doctrines, they never pay. It is character, a life, a centre, a Godman that must lead the way. . . . That centre, that Godman to lead was born in India. He was the great Rāmakrishna Paramahamsa, and round him this band is slowly gathering." This

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was Swāmi Vivekānanda's confession of faith; but would it not appear too dogmatic to the Indian public of that day? They liked his patriotism, but could not go the whole hog with him in his religious beliefs.

We write all this by way of showing why the India of those days had to wait for the leader's return for her regeneration, though she was never in want of spiritual giants. All the necessary elements were there, without the much needed driving force and cohesion. Hinduism had to be raised from the morass of passivity, disintegration and self-complacence, and placed on the path of dynamic progress. That auspicious moment was near at hand. But as yet, at every turn, Swāmi Vivekānanda was up in arms, almost single-handed, against a sea of opposition. He had no money, he was not well understood, and his following had still to be won over and consolidated. But the indomitable and undaunted leader was not to be discouraged. He had taken up the cross and must shed the last drop of his blood for the good of humanity, come what might.

At this time only a few of his brother-disciples stayed at the Ālambāzār Math, while a few others moved about in different parts of India on pilgrimage, returning to the Math at intervals. But some others had been residing permanently outside for years—visiting holy shrines or sitting in undisturbed meditation in places of their own choice. Swāmis Brahmānanda and Turiyānanda were at Vrindāban; Adbhutānanda was in Calcutta; Akhandānanda and Abhedānanda were travelling separately in Western India. Advaitānanda lived at Benares; Yogānanda generally stayed either with the Holy Mother or in places outside the Math, his health having been irrecoverably ruined by too much austerity. Niranjanānanda moved about in the South. Vivekānanda's first task was to gather them all at the monastery, so as to organise them better

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for future sustained activities. And as an organisation crystallises round co-ordinated tasks that the members like, he set such important duties before them as would evoke their dormant power. Thus, when after the success of Swāmiji in Chicago the jealous Christian missionaries and some Indians of other denominations in America began to vilify him, he felt the need of support from India in the form of public recognition of his services as well as appreciation of the hospitality of the parliament officials and the American people. But the unorganised Hindu society could not be quickened to action easily, much to the chagrin of the Swāmi. It was only after almost a year that the country rose to an active sense of duty, the credit for the successful Townhall meeting in Calcutta going to Swāmis Abhedānanda, Rāmakrishnānanda and Sāradānanda, who were roused by Swāmiji's repeated call to action. At the Swāmi's request, Swāmi Turiyānanda returned form Vrindāban in August, 1894, to take up the training of the young novices. In December Swāmi Brahmānanda came back to the Math, though after a short stay there he preferred to live in Calcutta in the rented house of the Holy Mother. Swāmis Advaitānanda and Adbhutānanda chose to stay away till Swāmi Vivekānanda's return to India. Swāmis Niranjanānanda and Shivānanda undertook some kind of peripatetic preaching in South India, which was approved by Swāmiji.

And now a new development, centring round Swāmi Akhandānanda in the first instance and full of great promise in the future, was taking place in Rājputānā, where the Swāmi, with the help of local potentates was making his first experiments at working out certain schemes of social betterment. There can be no doubt that the inspiration came from Swāmi Vivekānanda; for he alone, among his brother-disciples,

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conceived the idea of linking up monasticism with social service, as is traceable in his correspondence of the time and substantiated by the story of his life. The poverty and social inequities of the Hindus cut him to the quick, so much so that, according to his own assessment, this was one of the factors that impelled him to go to the West for help. Even before going to the West, we find him writing about the heartless oppression by the priests (August 7, 1889), and contrasting "the wonderful heart" of Buddha with the intellect of Shankara (February, 1890). As early as July 10, 1893, he writes from Yokohama to his Madras disciples, "How many men—unselfish, thorough-going men—is Madras ready now to supply, to struggle unto life and death to bring about a new state of things—sympathy for the poor, and bread to their hungry mouths, enlightenment to the people at large—and struggle unto death to make men of them who have been brought to the level of beasts by the tyranny of your forefathers?" In the same letter he says, "Kick out the priests." On October 27, 1894, appeared these lines: "Where should one go to seek for God? Are not all the poor, the miserable, the weak, God?" And along with this we must remember that Swāmi Akhandānanda had lived in personal touch with Swāmi Vivekānanda for a long time before the latter sailed for America. Just a few weeks after his departure, Swāmi Akhandānanda met Swāmis Brahmānanda and Turiyānanda at the Abu Road railway station, when the following conversation ensued:

Brahmānanda: "Do you know why Swāmiji has gone to America?"

Akhandānanda: "No."

Brahmānanda: "During his travel in the Western Ghats and the Mahrāttā province, Swāmiji used to shed tears at the poverty of the common people and the

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oppression of the rich. He said to us, 'Mark it, my brothers, in the prevailing state of poverty in this country, the time is not opportune for preaching religion. I shall talk of religion if I ever succeed in removing the poverty and misery of the country. That is why I am going to the land of Croesus, to try my luck to find some way out.' "

And it was at Swāmi Brahmānanda's advice that Swāmi Akhandānanda went to Khetri, the domain of Raja Ajit Singh, a disciple of Swāmiji, which place thus became the first field of his activity (*Smritikathā*, pp. 108-9).

It must, however, be added that Swāmi Akhandānanda had a compassionate heart by nature, which was impelled to action not only by the words of Swāmi Vivekānanda but also by what he himself saw and heard everywhere. As he moved through Gujarāt and Rājputānā, he was so much struck on the one hand by the high motives that inspired some of the private charities, and on the other the callous public neglect of the poor, that he wrote to Swāmi Vivekānanda in America seeking for his advice. The prompt reply came, "The poor, the ignorant, the illiterate, the afflicted—let these be your God; know that service to these is the highest religion." That fixed the course of action for Swāmi Akhandānanda. With the permission of the Raja of Khetri, he got the boys of the lower classes admitted into the Raja's High School. Proceeding further into the interior, he established a Middle English School at Nāthdwārā. Returning to Khetri, he introduced Vedic studies into the local Sanskrit school. Ultimately he came back to Ālambāzār at the close of 1895, handing over his work to local people.

Swāmi Vivekānanda noted from across the seas all these developments that his success in the West was ushering into India. He had now only to come over

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to take the reins in hand. But he was in no hurry to do so; he waited for the right moment, while he took stock of the situation and kept on preparing the ground. He noted that Madras could not boast as yet of a permanent Rāmakrishna or Vedānta centre. Of course, there were many devoted hearts who ran the *Brahmavādin* and *Prabuddha Bhārata*. There were also occasional celebrations of Shri Rāmakrishna's birthday on a humble scale. And there were informal study circles that carried on their work spasmodically. But, though not wanting in enthusiasm, the devotees had no leader on the spot and no financial backing to undertake anything of an imposing character.

Near Calcutta, there was the Ālambāzar monastery, a latent force of immense possibility, but lacking in organised effort and enthusiasm for sallying forth into new fields. Swāmi Akhandānanda had, in a sense, just broken the ice. But his work, by itself, meant almost nothing either from the point of view of the Ālambāzār Math or in the wider context of Indian life. As a preparation for the coming onset, therefore, the general had first to marshal his forces more adequately. By persuasion he had partially succeeded in calling his brother-disciples back to the monastery or Calcutta.[1] They had now to be inspired to organise themselves and undertake responsibilities in a methodical way. Accordingly, Swāmiji's letters from the West became gradually full of practical suggestions and directions to energise the Math that was, till then, only following the routine duties of a traditional monastery. In 1895 he wrote, "You should organise all for conjoint work." And then there was the direction, "We must first

[1] According to Swāmi Akhandānanda, he found Swāmis Premānanda, Niranjanānanda, Shivānanda, Rāmakrishnānanda, Adbhutānanda and others at the Math. Swāmis Brahmānanda, Yogānanda, Sāradānanda and Trigunātitānanda lived in Calcutta. That was in 1895-97. (*Smritikathā*, p. 131.)

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build a Math for Mother. First Mother and Mother's daughters, then Father and Father's sons" (*Complete Works,* VII, p. 417). History, however, had ordained otherwise. But that is a different story. In other letters written in the same year we have, "Now is the time for you to apply yourself to starting the magazine" (*Complete Works,* VI, p. 261); "If you want any good to come, just throw your ceremonials overboard and worship the living God, the Man-God—every being that wears a human form—God in His universal as well as individual aspect" (*ibid.,* p. 279); "To do the highest good to the world, every one down to the lowest—this is our vow. . . . Rāmakrishna Paramahamsa came for the good of the world" (*ibid.,* p. 281); "An organised society is wanted. . . . Celebrate this year's Shri Rāmakrishna Festival with such éclat as to make it a record" (*ibid.,* p. 284); "Know partiality to be the chief cause of all evil . . . bear with everyone's shortcomings. . . . A commodious building is needed. . . . Every morning there should be a little reading from the scriptures" (*ibid.,* pp. 290-92). And so on and on the letters proceed to formulate organisational ideas and infuse the new spirit of approach, till we come to a letter which lists fifteen points in order of historical evolution and logical sequence, showing the interconnection and interplay of personalities, ideals and institutions. The topics concern scriptures, Buddha, caste, work, sects, uplift of women, a Math for women, and so on (*ibid.,* pp. 294-96). The same letter gives detailed directions for the celebration of Shri Rāmakrishna's birthday (*ibid.,* pp. 299-301). Another letter lists the conditions under which people of questionable character may join in the public celebrations at the monastery (*ibid.,* p. 333). The culmination of the series is reached in the letter of April 27, 1896, which deliberately works out a constitution. It mentions the need of a commodious building

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with separate rooms for office, books, smoking, meeting visitors, study of the scriptures and religious discourses; it prescribes the method of receiving visitors, emphasises the need of silence and quiet isolation, and warns against mutual scandal-mongering and bad temper. There is a scheme for setting up a Governing Body with office-bearers and allotment of duties. The Math departments are enumerated—Study, Propaganda and Religious practice. Then there are general remarks about the relationship with women visitors. And there are broad suggestions about "the new religion of this age—the synthesis of Yoga, Knowledge, Devotion and Work." The question of the Women's Math receives attention here again. And above everything, the meaning of Shri Rāmakrishna's life in relation to the new movement is clarified (*Complete Works,* VII,pp. 421-28). In a sense, this letter is a sort of Magna Charta of the Rāmakrishna movement. The fuller and more practical Belur Math Rules, that emerged later to guide the monks of the Order, are strongly reminiscent of this letter as well as of the earlier ones mentioned here. Swāmi Vivekānanda has often been described as a visionary and inspired saint, without much practical sense. We wish people knew him better!

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ON THE MARCH

(1897—1902)

The forces were thus fully arrayed for the leader to come and give the marching orders. He landed at Colombo on January 15, 1897. India and Ceylon had been on the tiptoe of expectation, and the Swāmi was accorded a royal reception wherever he went, with flags, festoons and triumphal arches. He was veritably a national hero returning to his homeland fresh from his victory. Addresses of welcome were presented at every turn, to which Swāmiji gave suitable replies. He talked about the reconstruction of national life through education on a religious basis. He condemned the national lethargy masquerading as spiritual equipoise, and exhorted one and all to learn from the West how to order the material life of the nation. He unfolded his plan of work and invited co-operation from all. He vigorously exposed the claims of pseudo-religious organisations and misguided reform societies, and traced the development of Indian history to reveal the fundamental spiritual urge directing the national life at every crucial period of cultural conflict. With these facts the readers of Swāmiji's works are familiar, so that there is no need for us to deal with them in detail, though these, to some extent, explain why the history of the Rāmakrishna Math and Mission took its actual line of development, rather than any other.

To gain a working knowledge of the main ideas disseminated by the Swāmi during his Indian tour, we must fix our attention primarily on two lectures delivered at Madras: "My Plan of Campaign" and "The

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Work Before Us" (*Complete Works,* III). Says the Swāmi, "My plan is to follow the ideas of the great ancient Masters" (p. 220). "To the reformers I will point out that I am a greater reformer than any one of them. They want to reform only little bits. I want root-and-branch reform. Theirs is the method of destruction, mine is that of construction. I do not believe in reform, I believe in growth" (p. 213). "So in India social reform has to be preached by showing how much more spiritual a life the new system will bring; and politics has to be preached by showing how much it will improve the one thing that the nation wants—its spirituality" (p. 220). "Before flooding India with socialistic or political ideas, first deluge the land with spiritual ideas" (p. 221). "The first work that demands our attention is that the most wonderful truths confined in our Upanishads, in our scriptures, in our Purānas, must be brought out from the books, brought out from the monasteries, . . . and scattered broadcast all over the land" (*ibid.*). "My plan is to start institutions in India to train our young men as preachers of the truths . . . in India and outside India" (p. 223). "What we want is strength; so believe in yourselves. . . . It is a man-making religion that we want" (p. 224). "Nationalism of a purely agitational pattern cannot carry us far; with patriotism must be associated a real feeling for others, a practical solution of the problems in hand, and steadfastness, sincerity and purity of motive" (pp. 225-26). Again, nationalism must not be equated with narrow-mindedness. "To become broad, to go out, to amalgamate, to universalise, is the end of our aims" (p. 271); ". . . we must not forget that we have also to teach a great lesson to the world" (p. 272). "But the gift of India is the gift of religion and philosophy" (p. 273).

These themes, culled at random from those two

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lectures, together with the sayings we quoted while discussing the Swāmi's Western work in our last chapter, should sufficiently indicate the ideological background against which the history of our Order unfolded. For this an elaborate study of his works is hardly a necessity. Nor need we follow the great Swāmi through all the towns and cities of India that he visited. We shall meet him only at important points.

Swāmiji reached Calcutta on February 20, 1897. The arrival was an occasion for wide rejoicing and testified to the organising capacity of the followers of Shri Rāmakrishna. The public was solidly behind the Ālambāzār brotherhood. The first impact gave the brotherhood a clear idea of the forces they would be called upon to canalise.

The Swāmi himself was soon in a vortex of engagements. Shortly after his arrival, the birthday of Shri Rāmakrishna was celebrated on a grand scale on the Dakshineshwar temple premises. The Swāmi's presence gave a great impetus to it. Thus, through public appearances and lectures and private interviews, the Swāmi began to influence the life of the country as a whole.

At the monastery he had many occupations. The novices had to be trained; land for the Math had to be secured; and then there were national calamities, pestilence and famine, that required the instant attention of himself and the monks. A pleasant and important function at this time was the initiation into Sannyāsa by Swāmiji of four Brahmachārins—Kālikrishna, Kānāi, Sushil and Jogendra Nāth Chatterjee—who had been attracted to the Math by the message of Shri Rāmakrishna and the achievements of Swāmiji, and who now became known as Swāmis Virajānanda, Nirbhayānanda, Prakāshānanda and Nityānanda respectively. Sudhir Chandra Chakravarti, elder brother of

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Sushil, also joined in April as a disciple of Swāmiji, although he was later initiated into Sannyāsa by Swāmi Niranjanānanda, to be known thereafter as Swāmi Shuddhānanda. For the sake of convenience we may mention that about this time some other young men too joined the Order after severing all family ties. There was Haripada Chatterjee, who joined the Ālambāzār Math in 1896, to be initiated into Sannyāsa in 1898 under the name of Swāmi Bodhānanda; Govinda Chandra Shukul, or Swāmi Ātmānanda, who had joined the Math in 1896, but took orders in 1898-99; Khagendra Nāth Chatterjee, who placed himself under the discipleship of Swāmiji early in 1897 and soon took the monastic vow under the name of Swāmi Vimalānanda; Ajay Hari Banerjee, who came to the Math in the summer of 1897 and took the vow of Sannyāsa on March 29, 1898, along with Surendra Nāth Bose, to be known as Swāmis Swarupānanda and Sureshwarānanda respectively.

Besides, there were: Achalānanda or Kedār Nāth Maulik; Sachchidānanda II or Motilāl Mukherji, who joined in 1899; Dhirānanda or Krishnalāl Mukherji, who came in November, 1899; Kalyānānanda or Dakshinā Ranjan Guha, initiated in June, 1899; Somānanda or Krishnamurti Nāidu, initiated in May, 1899; Satyakāmānanda or Ashutosh Mitra, initiated in March, 1900; Paramānanda or Suresh Chandra Guha Thākurtā, who joined in 1900; and Nishchayānanda or Suraj Rāo, invested with the ochre garb in 1901. They all counted themselves as the disciples of Swāmiji. And to these must be added two earlier names—Swāmis Nirmalānanda and Sadānanda.

Outstanding as these achievements were, the Swāmi's greatest triumph lay in re-orientating the outlook of his brother-disciples from ideas of personal salvation to a sympathetic comprehension of the needs

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of the world, which led to a submersion of the individual in the service of the All—the Infinite Brahman behind everything. His letters and lectures were saturated with that one idea; but where writings could at best induce intellectual conviction, personal contact and persuasion effected a conversion. As a first tangible result of this Swāmi Rāmakrishnānanda abandoned his twelve years' secluded life of worship and self-culture to proceed to Madras in March, 1897, to start a Rāmakrishna centre there. This monastery was the fulfilment of a promise Swāmi Vivekānanda had made to the Madras devotees. On his return from the West to Madras, Swāmiji was entreated by his staunch devotees to send a Swāmi to build up a permanent centre there. As this was very much in agreement with his own line of thought, he said, "Yes, I will send you one who is more orthodox than your most orthodox brahmins, and more learned than your pundits." Evidently he had in mind Swāmi Rāmakrishnānanda, who seems to have been divinely fashioned for the South Indian work. Arriving at Madras with Swāmi Sadānanda as his assistant, he started the monastery at once under the name of the "Rāmakrishna Home" at a rented house in Triplicane, on the Ice House Road, paying rupees thirty a month. The house no longer exists. This monastery was a replica of the parent monastery at Ālambāzār, with its daily routine of worship and associated functions, with the added element of extensive preaching. Within three months, the Math was removed at the instance of the proprietor of the Ice House to some of the ground-floor rooms of that palatial building, also known as Castle Kernan. This extensive property, with a three-storied house and land around, belonged to Mr. Biligiri Iyengār, a disciple of Swāmi Vivekānanda, who set apart those few rooms for the Math without any rent. From there

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too Swāmi Rāmakrishnānanda conducted his classes on the *Gitā* and Vedānta, and delivered public lectures on various subjects—expanding his sphere of activity all the time and getting more appreciation and better response.

Another result of Swāmi Vivekānanda's propagation of the new ideology was the starting of a famine relief centre in the Murshidābād district at the instance of Swāmi Akhandānanda, who in the course of his travels came face to face with the grimness of the situation and reported the matter to the Ālambāzār Math.

By then Swāmi Vivekānanda had returned to Calcutta after a short stay at Darjeeling, where he had gone for reasons of health with Swāmi Brahmānanda, Mr. G. C. Ghosh, and others. Swāmiji had long entertained the idea of starting an organisation for spiritual, mental and material service with the co-operation of the monks, the devotees and the general public. He had thought over the matter at Darjeeling, and now he gave a definite shape to this idea by calling a representative meeting of all the monks and devotees on May 1, 1897, at the house of the late Balarām Bose, 57 Rāmkānta Bose Street, Bāghbāzār, Calcutta. At this meeting, by a unanimous decision a new organisation was inaugurated, and in the second meeting of May 5, the following aims and objects were adopted:

"The Association (Sangha) shall be known as the Rāmakrishna Mission.

"The aim of the Sangha is to preach those truths which Shri Rāmakrishna has, for the good of humanity, preached and demonstrated by practical application in his own life, and to help others to put these truths into practice in their lives for their temporal, mental and spiritual advancement.

"The duty of the Mission is to conduct in the right spirit the activities of the movement inaugurated by

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Shri Rāmakrishna for the establishment of fellowship among the followers of different religions, knowing them all to be so many forms only of one undying Eternal Religion.

"Its Methods of Action are:

"(*a*) To train men so as to make them competent to teach such knowledge or sciences as are conducive to the material and spiritual welfare of the masses;

"(*b*) to provide and encourage arts and industries; and

"(*c*) to introduce and spread among the people in general Vedāntic and other religious ideas in the way in which they were elucidated in the life of Shri Rāmakrishna.

"Indian Work Department:

"The activities of the Mission should be directed to the establishment of Maths and Āshramas in different parts of India for the training of Sannyāsins and such of the householders as may be willing to devote their lives to educate others, and to the finding of the means by which they would be enabled to educate the people, by going about from one province to another.

"Its work in the Foreign Department should be to send trained members of the Order to countries outside India to bring about a closer relation and better understanding between India and foreign countries.

"The aims and ideals of the Mission being purely spiritual and humanitarian, it shall have no connection with politics.

"Any one who believes in the mission of Shri Rāmakrishna, or who sympathises or is willing to co-operate with the above-mentioned aims and objects of the Association, is eligible for membership" (*Life of Swāmi Vivekānanda,* pp. 501-2).

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After the resolutions were passed, office-bearers were appointed. Swāmi Vivekānanda himself became the General President, while Swāmis Brahmānanda and Yogānanda became the President and Vice-President respectively of the Calcutta centre ; Mr. Narendra Nāth Mitra, a disciple of the Master and a solicitor, was elected Secretary, and Dr. Shashi Bhushan Ghosh and Sharat Chandra Sarkār, Under-Secretaries, and Sharat Chandra Chakravarty, Reader of scriptures.

The first problem in the field of philanthropy that the Mission was called upon to tackle was the Famine relief in Murshidābād. Naturally, Swāmi Vivekānanda played a decisive role in undertaking the work. Writes Swāmi Akhandānanda in his *Smritikathā* (pp. 240-41): "Swāmiji inquired about me immediately after his return from Darjeeling. Swāmi Premānanda showed him the three letters I had written from Mahulā . The tale of woe of the afflicted overwhelmed him so much that he immediately wrote to me a letter of encouragement and sent two assistants and some money (Rs. 150/-) from his own pocket for starting the work." Of the two workers whom Swāmiji sent, one was Surendra, later, Swāmi Sureshwarānanda. The other assistant was Swāmi Nityānanda, who, however, left after a while. Mr. Chāru Chandra Bose, Secretary of the (Buddhist) Mahābodhi Society of Calcutta, offered at this time monetary help from the Famine relief fund of the Society. So the work was started at Mahulā in right earnest on May 15, 1897, and was carried on for two months with the help of the above Society. But then a controversy arose. The Mahābodhi Society wanted to receive exclusive official credit for the work, which the Mission naturally resented. Being apprised of this, Swāmi Vivekānanda wrote on July 13 from Almorā, where he had gone, "Should the poor die of starvation while you people at the top indulge in controversy as

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to whom the credit should go to? If Mahābodhi wants to take all the credit, let it. Let the poor be benefited." That was how a Vivekānanda alone could write. But through the unremitting industry of Swāmis Brahmānanda, Akhandānanda and Rāmakrishnānanda and the Madras devotees, the work was soon organised on an independent footing. The Government too came to the Mission's help. Not only that, the work extended to contiguous areas also.

Three months after the starting of the Mahulā work, Swāmi Virajānanda was sent to distribute relief to the famine-stricken people of Deoghar (Bihar), and still later Swāmi Prakāshānanda doled out rice to the famished people of Dakshineshwar (from October 12, 1897 to January 9, 1898). Soon after Swāmi Trigunātita[1] had to go to Dināpur to organise a relief centre at a village called Birole.

The famine at Mahulā and the neighbouring villages left behind some orphans who had to be taken care of. Swāmi Akhandānanda readily took charge of two of them, who formed the nucleus of the future Rāmakrishna Mission Āshrama of Sārgāchhi. Initiated at the end of 1897 as an orphanage, the Āshrama turned to educational, philanthropic and spiritual fields by stages.

In connection with this Mahulā relief two facts deserve notice. Swāmi Vivekānanda wanted Swāmi Akhandānanda to be methodical and practical in his approach. He also insisted that reports of the work should be published in the newspapers. Swāmi Akhandānanda could not reconcile himself to this publicity, and avoided sending any report. But Swāmi Brahmānanda, following Swāmiji, was equally inexorable in his demand for a report, till at last

[1] The Swāmi had thus shortened his name at the suggestion of Swāmi Vivekānanda.

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Swāmi Akhandānanda, in desperation, sat down to write one—only to visualise in his mind's eye the Master telling him, "Do you want me or the public? On one side am I, and on the other the public." He burst into tears, but he did produce a report some days later. One possible interpretation of this incident is that though the Swāmi was a staunch follower of Swāmi Vivekānanda, even he could not bridge the mental gulf between God and public responsibility without a struggle. This is the first lesson that we should learn ; and the second is the social significance of the act. Swāmi Vivekānanda wrote with joy how brahmin boys were serving cholera patients of the lowest caste. Perhaps this little incident struck him as but the first murmurs of a social revolution that was bound to overtake the Hindu world because of its aroused civic consciousness—a revolution which the Swāmi aspired to bring about by combining Shankara's intellect with Buddha's heart. That, however, was by no means easy. For if the heart responded, the brain declined to co-operate, and *vice versa.*

The conflicting aims of religion and organised social service seemed irreconcilable indeed. Swāmi Akhandānanda was not alone in his doubts about the methods followed, if not the objectives aimed at, by Swāmi Vivekānanda. Even just after the meeting establishing the Rāmakrishna Mission Swāmi Yogānanda had said, "I confess that doubts sometimes arise in my mind, for as we saw it, *his* (Shri Rāmakrishna's) method of doing things was different, and I ask myself if we are not straying from the path chalked out by him." The leader had then laid the doubt at rest. But another day, as he was sitting in Balarām Bose's house, at Calcutta, the discussion again cropped up, and many of the brothers joined in it. That day Swāmi Yogānanda, in particular, was a little aggressive, to the extent

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of questioning the leader's faith in the Master, which kindled Swāmiji's emotion to white heat. He defended himself with vehemence till his voice choked, his frame shook, and with tears streaming from his eyes, he left the room, followed by some others who wanted to pacify him. At long last, he came back and explained that he purposely kept his devotion to the Master in check. He said, "Oh, I have work to do! I am a slave of Rāmakrishna, who left his work to be done by me and will not give me rest till I have finished it! And how shall I speak of him! Oh, his love for me!" The upshot of all this was that out of love for the leader the brother-disciples decided from that day not to question his interpretation of the Master's life and teachings, nor his method of work.

Thus this infant movement progressed through doubt and reassurance. Swāmi Vivekānanda, while at Almorā, asked Swāmi Shivānanda to proceed to Ceylon to preach Vedānta. The latter complied. He stayed in Colombo, doing useful work for seven months. On February 13, 1898, two or three days after he returned to Ālambāzār, the Math shifted from there across to Belur, at Nilāmbar Mukherjee's garden-house on the Ganges. This was necessitated by two reasons. The "wretched house" at Ālambāzār had received an "awful shaking" from the great earthquake of 1897, which damaged the building. But a more pressing reason was the need of being near the plot of land meant for the permanent site of the monastery, for the purchase of which an agreement had been entered into on February 3, 1898. The plot was ultimately secured for Rs. 39,000/-, donated by Miss Henrietta Müller, on March 4, 1898. The land measured over seven acres, and was right on the Ganges, a furlong to the north of the above-mentioned garden-house. There was much work to be done there. Fortunately, by then Hari

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Prasanna, a disciple of the Master, had resigned from his service as an Executive Engineer under the Government of Uttar Pradesh (then called the North-Western Province) and joined the monastery as a Brahmachārin. Two years later, on August 9, 1899, he took the vow of monasticism and changed his name to Swāmi Vijnānānanda. The supervision of the construction naturally devolved on him, while Swāmi Advaitānanda, persuaded to come from Benares, assisted him in the preliminary work such as grading the land, which was very uneven, because it had been used as a sort of dockyard for repairing small craft. There was a one-storied building for dwelling purposes with two rooms on the northern side and another on the south, connected by a verandah facing the Ganges. There was also a separate block for servants. The place was scarcely habitable. Swāmi Vijnānānanda's task was to remodel the main building by adding some more rooms above as well as one at the southern side. Another building with a couple of rooms above to serve as a shrine, and a kitchen, store and refectory below, had to be completed before the monastery or the Belur Math, as it came to be known, could be housed there. All this took a year. Mrs. Ole Bull's handsome contribution made the construction of the shrine possible, and also enabled Swāmi Vivekānanda to make an endowment for the monastery.

In the meantime, Shri Rāmakrishna's birthday celebrations for 1898, after the monastery had been removed to Nilāmbar's house, became a problem. These had been initiated in 1881 by Surendra Nāth Mitra and other devotees while the Master still lived at Dakshineshwar, and had been continued there year after year. They constituted an important annual function, offering an opportunity to all people, whether devotees or not, to be united in one place for a common

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purpose, with brotherly feelings, forgetting for a few hours at least all thought of social differences and even caste prejudices, under the silent, uplifting influence of Shri Rāmakrishna. For was he not the prophet of harmony in the modern age, whose birth on that day heralded a new era of spiritual hope and fulfilment in which all had the right to share? Everyone recognised the importance of the festival. But in 1898, the Trustees of the Kāli temple at Dakshineshwar raised the objection that the sanctity of the place would be defiled by the presence of the foreign disciples of Swāmi Vivekānanda. Under the circumstances, the monks would have preferred to have the celebrations on the new Math ground itself; but it was too uneven. Nothing daunted, Swāmi Yogānanda decided to hold the festival elsewhere; and through his dexterous arrangement, the birthday was celebrated on February 28, 1898, in another temple compound a little to the north, belonging to the Daws of Calcutta, who generously extended the necessary permission.

At that time Swāmi Sāradānanda was busy preaching in Boston, Montclair and other places of the United States, the New York work having been entrusted to local devotees. With the growth of the activities in India, Swāmi Vivekānanda felt that the executive responsibility should be divided among trained and competent persons. Accordingly, Swāmi Sāradānanda was recalled from America, and he arrived at Calcutta on February 14, 1898. And this was possible without jeopardising the American work, since Swāmi Abhedānanda had already reached New York on August 9, 1897, after handing over the London work to Mr. Sturdy. Needless to say, Swāmi Abhedānanda, with his scholarship and London experience, amply justified the expectations of the New York devotees, who gladly turned the work over to him.

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Inspired by Swāmi Vivekānanda, and determined to serve India under his direction, Miss Margaret E. Noble gave up home and attachment to her homeland. She reached Calcutta on January 28, 1898. Soon afterward, she was initiated into Brahmacharya on March 25. She also got her new name Niveditā. Since early March she had been residing in one of the existing buildings on the newly purchased Belur Math land along with Miss MacLeod and Mrs. Ole Bull, where they lived under the personal care and direction of Swāmi Vivekānanda. The Swāmi devoted much of his time to training Niveditā for work among Indian women, and encouraged by him, the Sister soon entered earnestly into the task, unmindful of her health and a white woman's prestige.

There was an outbreak of plague in Calcutta in April, 1898, when people began to quit the city in large numbers out of fear, the plague regulations of the Government adding fuel to the fire. Things came to such a pass that the soldiery had to be called in to quell the riots. Realising the gravity of the situation, Swāmi Vivekānanda, then at Darjeeling, cut short his stay to hurry down to Calcutta to organise various preventive measures. When others remonstrated, "Swāmiji, where will the funds come from?" he thundered back, "Why, we shall sell the newly purchased Math grounds, if necessary." But this extreme step was unnecessary, for the funds to carry on the immediate work were amply provided by the public. On the very day (May 3) that he arrived in Calcutta, he helped to draft a plague manifesto in Bengali and Hindi aimed at removing panic, and took other steps for street-cleaning etc. There was also a scheme for a segregation camp. But as the plague did not take an epidemic form, there was no need for further work.

The Swāmi left for Almorā, on the 11th May with

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his Western disciples. It was there that he received the news of Mr. Goodwin's death on the 2nd June of enteric fever at Ootacamund. At Almorā, again, came another sad piece of news which led Swāmiji to decide upon a course of action that was of great importance in the history of the movement. The inaugural number of *Prabuddha Bhārata* (Awakened India) had come out at Madras in July, 1896, under the able editorship of B. R. Rājam Iyer, a true Vedāntist and an ardent admirer of Swāmiji. Mr. Iyer, however, died in May, 1898, at the early age of twenty-six, and the magazine ceased publication after the June issue. On the eve of the Swāmi's departure for Kāshmir, he consulted Mr. Sevier about the resumption of the magazine. He said, "Sevier, you said you would work for the good of India. The climate of Bengal will not suit you. So why don't you stay somewhere near Almorā and undertake to conduct *Prabuddha Bhārata*? The journal has got over three thousand subscribers. It was first printed on my advice, and has gradually become a notable instrument for the dissemination of Vedāntic knowledge. I don't wish that it should be discontinued. And I am giving you a capable Editor. Swāmi Swarupānanda has particular experience in that line, and with the help of yourself and Swāmi Turiyānanda he will easily be able to run it."[1] Swāmiji had high hopes of Swāmi Swarupānanda, as was evidenced by his remark to his brother-disciples on the day the young man joined the Order, "We have made an acquisition today," and by his conferring Sannyāsa on him within a short time.

By common consent the *Prabuddha Bhārata* Office was transferred to a rented house at Almorā called "Thompson House," and the first issue from this new habitation came out in August, 1898, under the

[1] Swāmi Sāradānanda in the *Udbodhan*, Vol. IX, p. 111.

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MRS. SARA C. BULL
(*C.* 1850—1911)

J. J. GOODWIN
(*C.* 1870—1898)

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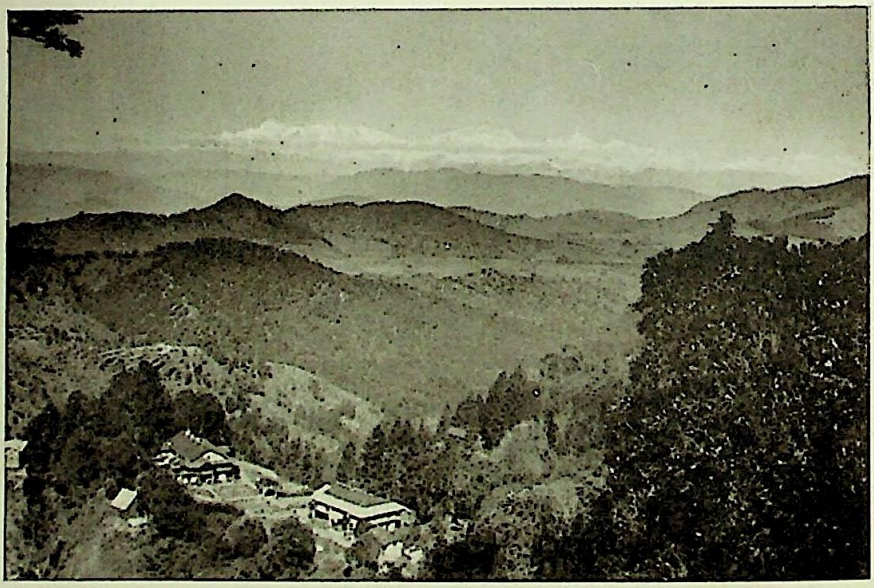
SHRI RĀMAKRISHNA MATH, MADRAS



ADVAITA ĀSHRAMA, MĀYĀVATI

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Editorship of Swāmi Swarupānanda. In the meantime Mr. Sevier was in search of a permanent house for a monastery in the Himālayas where he and Mrs. Sevier as also other Western people and the monks of the Rāmakrishna Order could practise Advaita Vedānta in all its purity. As Almorā proved not secluded enough, he looked for a place that would give him complete privacy. At last, he and Swāmi Swarupānanda selected after personal inspection the present premises of the Advaita Āshrama at Māyāvati in the district of Almorā, but fifty miles east of the town. The Āshrama was started on March 19, 1899, the birthday of Shri Rāmakrishna. A small hand press with outfit was bought and hauled up from the plains, and the *Prabuddha Bhārata* Office was transferred there. Swāmi Vivekānanda had always dreamt of such a place —where no ceremonial worship would be performed, and where the solitude, coolness, grandeur and natural beauty would spontaneously draw the mind inward. His joy knew no bounds when this dream was actualised.

All this time the remodelling of the buildings and the levelling of the ground at Belur proceeded satisfactorily under the management of Swāmis Vijnānānanda and Advaitānanda. On November 12, the day preceding that of the annual worship of Kāli, the Holy Mother visited Belur and sanctified the new Math premises by worshipping the Master there in the picture kept in her own shrine. She also went round the ground just before returning to Calcutta. The next morning she came to Sister Niveditā's small rented house at 16 Bosepara Lane, Bāghbāzār, and after worshipping the Master, blessed the proposal for opening a school there for girls, which began functioning from November 14 and came to be known in course of time as the Sister Niveditā Girls' School. Swāmis Vivekānanda, Brahmānanda and Sāradānanda had come to

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Calcutta in the evening of the 12th November to attend a public meeting held in this connection on that day.

The consecration of the Belur Math was fixed for December 9, 1898, though the monastery could actually be housed there only from January 2 next year, after the completion of all outstanding works. On December 9, Swāmi Vivekānanda worshipped the vessel containing Shri Rāmakrishna's ashes in the shrine at Nilāmbar's garden-house, and himself carried it on his shoulder from there to the new premises, remarking on the way to a disciple. "The Master once told me, 'I will go and live wherever it will be your pleasure to take me, carrying me on your shoulders, be it under a tree or in the humblest cottage!'" Placing the casket on a special Āsana (seat) spread on the ground, he again worshipped it and performed Homa. Then a rice porridge cooked by the Swāmi himself was offered to the Master, and all present partook of the consecrated food. While returning to the rented monastery, the Swāmi observed that he himself could not carry the Master back from where he had installed him, so that the above disciple had to do it. Just a few monks stayed on in the new buildings, pending the wholesale transfer on January 2, 1899.

The year 1899 saw the birth, on January 14, of the Bengali fortnightly *Udbodhan,* under the Editorship of Swāmi Trigunātita. It aimed at propagating the new message, and was for a time printed at its own press, purchased with the money provided by Swāmi Vivekānanda, and published from 14 Rām Chandra Maitra Lane, Kambuliātolā, Calcutta. At a later stage the press had to be sold off owing to difficulties of management. But the journal, converted into a monthly from its tenth year, continued; nay it gathered strength, till it became the nucleus of a publication centre of the Rāmakrishna Math.

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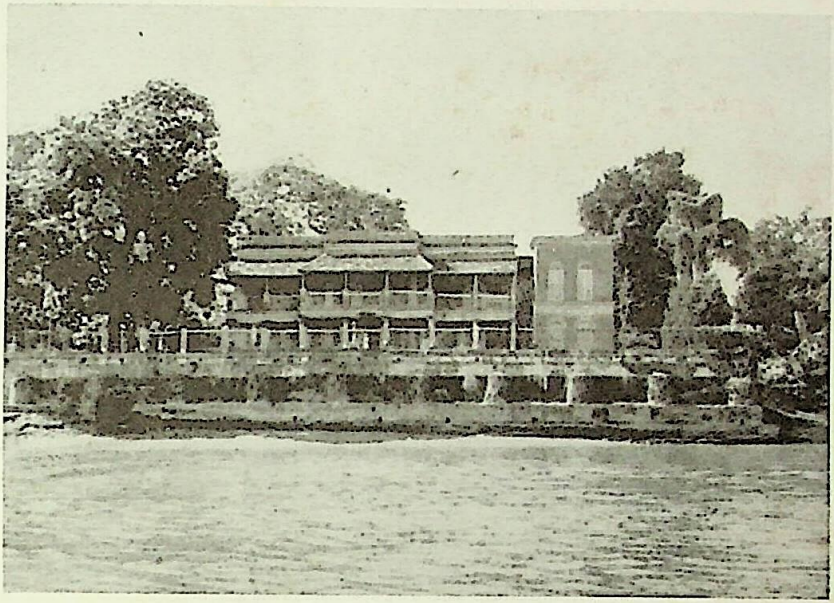

NILĀMBAR MUKHERJEE'S GARDEN-HOUSE

BELUR MATH

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MRS. C. E. SEVIER
(1847—1930)

SISTER NIVEDITĀ
(1867—1911)

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The Rāmakrishna Mission Association, founded by Swāmi Vivekānanda, had by now existed for two years, though we had few occasions to mention its name. And this is because its very constitution involved it in monastic activities, and the idea of pure "Mission Work" could not take root easily among its lay members. For three years it functioned almost wholly as a forum for discussion of religious topics under the chairmanship of the monks, who played the leading parts. In fact, it was becoming evident that the monks themselves had to bear the brunt of the "Mission work" also, though they could count on their lay brothers' help in various matters. And when the Belur Math came into existence, the Mission, as an organisation, was silently pushed into the background, the whole idea underlying the Association as well as its name having been fully appropriated by the monks and their monastery. *The Life of Swāmi Vivekānanda* states, "Soon after this Math was established as the central seat of the monastic order, the Rāmakrishna Mission Association ceased to function as an independent organisation, and the Math authorities themselves carried on the philanthropic and charitable work originally undertaken by the Mission Association" (p. 503). But whether the monks worked under the aegis of the Math or of the Mission—and the curious thing is that the two words were used indiscriminately—their hands were always full; for India had not many organisations to serve her during her ever recurring woes.

In 1899, plague again threatened to become epidemic in Calcutta; and the Rāmakrishna Mission (or Math) again took the field on March 31, for relief work under the energetic leadership of Swāmi Sadānanda, assisted by Sister Niveditā and others. About Sister Niveditā's part in the work, we have it on the authority of Sir Jadunāth Sarkār, an eye-witness, that when the

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sweepers had fled away, he chanced upon a white woman one day clearing the streets with broom and basket in hand. This was none other than Niveditā, whose courage and sense of civic duty spurred the local youths to take up the cleansing of the lanes and streets, following her example, and make their quarters free from the threat of the pestilence. As in the case of Sister Niveditā, the Calcutta people discovered in Sadānanda also an undaunted worker who shrank from no task, however gruesome it might be to others. If the stench of garbage accumulated in a narrow lane repelled even the practised sweepers, he would nonchalantly snatch the basket and spade from one of them and set about removing the decomposed heap till the sweepers too would step forward to help him. At the end, he would congratulate them and embrace them warmly, regardless of their social distance and dirty bodies. Or if there was an uncared-for patient, he would hug him and nurse him to recovery. This work too lasted for a very short time.

As the summer of 1899 approached, Swāmi Vivekānanda decided to go to the West again with Swāmi Turiyānanda, as also Sister Niveditā, who would disembark in England to collect funds for her school. The party sailed from Calcutta on June 20, by S.S. *Golcondā*, and arrived in London on July 31. The two Swāmis left London on August 16, to reach New York ten days later.

When Swāmiji left the shores of India, he had behind him a record of successes any one of which could make a leader justly feel proud. He had aroused the dormant spirit of the nation and directed it along constructive channels. To the Rāmakrishna Math and Mission he had given shape and substance. Stimulated by him, the Swāmis of the Order had begun various types of philanthropic activity; and some of them had

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started delivering public lectures and writing articles dealing not only with religion as such, but also with problems of national reconstruction on a spiritual basis. These were innovations calculated to strike the Hindu public with wonder. And yet one could understand a Swāmi Vivekānanda, a Swāmi Sāradānanda, a Swāmi Trigunātita, or a Swāmi Swarupānanda, preaching his religion in a novel way. But when on top of this, Swāmi Abhayānanda, a nun from the U.S.A., came in the early months of 1898 to lecture on Hinduism, to be followed by Sister Niveditā in the same field, people's wonder reached its limit. Not less striking was the embracing of Sannyāsa by a well-educated batch of young men. These were positive achievements of Swāmiji. And in addition there grew up a number of permanent centres, and more were in process of incubation. In a word, the dream of Vivekānanda was well on its way to fulfilment, proving that he could not only feel and think but could also act, and that vigorously.

But if he acted with lightning quickness, he planned with fool-proof thoroughness. He knew that the growing organisation required some rules of conduct. The Rāmakrishna Mission constitution was very limited in its scope. But the Rāmakrishna Maths or monasteries, being concerned with the private life of the monks, as well as their training for all kinds of public activity—religious, philanthropic, educational and other —required more detailed rules to go by. Swāmiji foresaw the need of these even while at Ālambāzār, where he formulated a short set of rules for the guidance of the novices. A more elaborate set of rules was dictated by him and written down by Swāmi Shuddhānanda when they were at Nilāmbar Mukherji's garden, Belur. These later on came to be known simply as the "Belur Math Rules." Meant exclusively for the monks of the

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Order, they continued for many years to be circulated privately among them. They were not placed before the public, inasmuch as religious orders like to keep certain things private, because they are held sacred by them. Another reason was that some portions of the Rules might jar upon the public mind when isolated from the lives and teachings of the Master and his disciples. But later on, when the number of monastic members grew very large, it was considered expedient to print the Rules. And the book was distributed among the confirmed monastic members of the Order with due caution. Since then it has been reprinted, to cope with the increasing membership. Meanwhile, however, many of the rules under different garbs have obtained publicity. The reader need not be too inquisitive about them, knowing for certain that there is nothing in them that is not already printed somewhere in *The Complete Works of Swāmi Vivekānanda.* With this reservation and warning, we shall now take up for our study only those of the Rules that can throw some light on our history.

The first point to note is that Swāmi Vivekānanda was never dogmatic about anything. He knew that the Rules were framed under certain conditions which might change, necessitating a fresh enunciation. So he concludes the Rules as follows: "These rules will admit of being added to and altered according to necessity." And we shall see as we proceed that the Math organisation, as distinguished from the Mission, took advantage of this flexibility to supplement these Rules from time to time, though so far nobody has even suggested modification of any of the original Rules, they being considered sacrosanct.

Another point that comes out clearly is that the great Swāmi wanted the Belur Math to be the chief institution of the new movement, setting the norm for

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others to follow. The duty of guiding the others too was to be her privilege. In the Ālambāzār Math Rules there is this categorical statement: "This Math shall be considered to be the chief Math. All the Maths under it must abide by the rules of this Math." This thought had already been expressed in a letter written by Swāmiji on May 2, 1895 from the U.S.A. (*Complete Works,* V, p. 62). The Belur Math naturally inherited that exalted position. The Ālambāzār Math Rules also make room for some sort of democratic procedure in the management of the monastery and the appointment of its chief dignitaries. There is also provision for disciplined life, spiritual practices, habits of cleanliness, obedience, reverence to seniors, silence and adherence to other observances for a healthy community life.

The Belur Math Rules start thus:

1. This Math is established to work out one's own liberation, and to train oneself to do good to the world in every way, along the lines laid down by Bhagavān Shri Rāmakrishna. For the women too there will be started a similar Math.

2. The Women's Math will be conducted on exactly the same principles as that for the men. There will be this restriction that in the Women's Math there shall be no connection with men, and in that of the men no connection with women.

3. Two such Maths will be started in some suitable places in the Himālayas and conducted on similar principles.

4. The Women's Math will be managed by the men from a distance, so long as competent women are not available for the task. After that they will themselves manage all their affairs.

Rules 5, 6 and 7 emphasise the need of learning, renunciation and preaching. Then the Rules proceed:

8. Such Maths must be founded all over the world.

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In some countries only spirituality is needed ; in others some amount of material comfort is extremely necessary. Thus we must lead nations and individuals into the realm of spirituality through their particular path, by fulfilling the particular wants that such nations and individuals may be most suffering from.

9. The first and foremost task in India is the propagation of education and spirituality among the masses. It is impossible for hungry men to become spiritual, unless food is provided for them. Hence our paramount duty lies in showing them new ways of food supply.

10. The Math will not pay much attention to social reform. For social evils are a sort of disease in the social body, and if that body be nourished by education and food, those evils will die out of themselves. Hence instead of wasting its energy in the trumpeting of social evils, it should be the aim of this Math to nourish the social body.

Rules 11 to 15 speak of the need of "strength of character," "self-reliance and self-confidence," "faith in the guru" and "faith in the disciple," taking decisions unanimously or, failing that, by a majority, and the qualifications for admission to the Math. Rules 16 and 17 divide the members under two categories—novices and monks. Rule 18 provides for the admission of boys for training with the permission of their guardians. Rule 19 lays emphasis on family culture in the matter of selecting candidates. That cautious approch was made at least sixty years ago, since when society has moved more and more towards equality of culture, and the Math too has widened the scope of this Rule, till there is absolutely no consideration of a candidate's social status, if he is qualified spiritually and otherwise. Rule 20 underlines Swāmiji's well-known dictum that in India "material improvement, education, social

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reform and everything must be introduced through religion." Rule 21 envisages the formation of a university with initial stress on technology.

22. The root of all misery in India is the wide gulf between the lower and upper classes. Unless this difference is made up, there is no hope of any well-being for the people. Therefore we must send preachers to all places to give the masses education and religious teaching.

In explanation of this last clause we may mention that the Swāmi sometimes described himself as a "socialist," which fact has been overemphasised by some writers in recent years, especially in Bengal. In this connection, his oft-quoted utterance is, "I am a socialist, not because I think it is a perfect system, but half a loaf is better than no bread. The other systems have been tried and found wanting. Let this one be tried—if for nothing else, for the novelty of the thing" (*Complete Works,* VI, pp. 342-43). The careful reader will note that the advice here is not one of perfection but of a necessity. Moreover, the statement is not an outright avowal of socialism as it is ordinarily understood; there is a degree of mental reservation which the Swāmi expresses elsewhere: "The solution is not by bringing down the higher, but by raising the lower up to the level of the higher. And that is the line of work that is found in all our books, . . . What is the plan? The ideal at one end is the Brāhmana, and the ideal at the other end is the Chandāla; and the whole work is to raise the Chandāla up to the Brāhmana" (*Complete Works,* III, p. 295). Anyway, we cannot digress too far. Suffice it to say that the Swāmi's motto seems to have been: From caste to equality through culture—by a process of levelling up rather than levelling down. This fact becomes quite clear in a subsequent section of the Rules. To quote the relevant

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portion: "What is called politics in society is nothing but the struggle between the privileged and non-privileged classes, brought on by this difference in enjoyment. . . . Hence our object is not to destroy caste distinctions, but to equalise the distinction of privileges. Our chief vow of life is to see that every one down to the Chandāla be helped to attain the right to Dharma, Artha, Kāma and Moksha (virtue, wealth, legitimate enjoyment and liberation)." In modern terminology, it is a plea for equality of opportunity and freedom of choice. The goal is set forth in bold words, "The ideal of this world is that state when the whole world will again be Brāhmana in nature. When there will be no necessity of the Sudra, Vaisya and kshatriya powers; when men will be born with yoga powers; when spiritual force will completely triumph over material force; . . . then only the distinction of caste will be at an end, ushering in the Satya-yuga (Golden Age). . . . We must adopt only that kind of caste division which gradually leads to that goal."

So far as the application of these broad principles in the field of social service is concerned, we quote the following from Sister Niveditā, who is erroneously supposed by some to have been trained by Swāmi Vivekānanda to lead in revolutionary politics, for which purpose she allegedly cut off her connection with the Mission. Writes she in her *The Master as I saw him* (pp. 287-89): "Our Master (meaning Swāmi Vivekānanda), at any rate, regarded the Order to which he belonged as one whose lot was cast for all time with the cause of Woman and the People. . . . He ignored all the proposals that reached him which would have pledged him to one party or another as its leader. Only let Woman and the People receive education! All further questions of their fate, they would themselves be competent to settle." The conclusion that

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Niveditā arrives at is also borne out by what follows in the Belur Math Rules. We quote Rules 23 and 24:

23. Hence the present and future authorities of this Math must always bear in mind that this Math be on no account reduced to a Thākurbāri (temple) of the Bābājis.

24. A Thākurbāri does a little good to a few; it satisfies the curiosity of a handful minority; but this Math will bring welfare to the whole world.

These are the principles underlying the monastery. The subsequent Rules are corollaries to or an elaboration of these. We cannot afford to enter into them in detail. Only a few facts may be mentioned in passing. Shri Rāmakrishna, for instance, is made the central figure in the whole scheme. But this is not done in any sectarian sense. As the Swāmi puts it, "In other words, the Vedas and other scriptures were so long enveloped in darkness, and Shri Rāmakrishna is the lamp that once more has brought them to light. Hence it is quite clear that new scriptures are unnecessary. New light is coming from the ancient, eternal scriptures; we must gather their meaning through the microscope of Shri Rāmakrishna's life. His utterances, well compiled, and attested by his constant attendants, will be honoured as commentaries to the Vedas." About spiritual practice the Rule is, "The object of this Math is to form characters combining Jnāna, Bhakti, Yoga and Karma, and all the spiritual disciplines that are necessary for that end will be accepted as the disciplines of this Math."

After the Math and the Mission had their men, money, programme, rules and actual work, another thing that caught Swāmiji's attention was to devise an emblem that would tell the public at a glance of the ideas behind the twin institutions, and also remind the Math and Mission members of the goal they were called

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upon to attain. The emblem, in short, was to depict Shri Rāmakrishna's message in a visual form. It is difficult to assign any definite date to the conception of this emblem. For aught we know, the first written reference to it is in a letter dated July 24, 1900, from Swāmi Vivekānanda to Miss Josephine MacLeod. As such, the idea might have taken concrete shape after his stay for some months in America during his second visit. Nevertheless, for convenience of treatment we present it here. A representation of the emblem which is used by both the Math and the Mission, and which became the seal of the Mission after its registration in 1909, will be found on the title-page of the book. The components of the emblem are these: "A lake ruffled by the wind; the sun rising, as it were, from its waters; a full-blown lotus rearing its head above two floating leaves; a swan sailing gracefully on the troubled waters; and a serpent with outstretched tongue, upraised hood and a Mantra in the central part of its body . . . meaning, 'May the Self inspire and guide us'" (*Prabuddha Bhārata,* Vol. X, p. 1). In explanation of this, the Swāmi himself writes in the above-mentioned letter: "The sun = Knowledge. The stormy water = Work. The lotus = Love. The serpent = Yoga. The swan = the Self. The Motto = May the Swan (the Supreme Self) send us that. It is the mind-lake." In another letter dated July 5, 1901, he writes to Miss Mary Hale, "In the Mission Seal, the snake represents mysticism; the sun knowledge; the worked up waters activity; the lotus love; the swan the soul in the midst of all."

So much for his Indian achievements. On his arrival in America in August, 1899, Swāmi Vivekānanda was delighted to hear of the success of Swāmi Abhedānanda. The Vedānta Society of New York had been incorporated on October 28, 1898 and thus placed on a permanent footing. He was convinced that the east

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coast of the United States needed no immediate attention from him, so that he could devote his remaining energy in waking up the cities of the western coast. Earlier than that, however, he spent about ten days at "Ridgely Manor," Mr. Leggett's country house, where on September 21, 1899, he handed to Niveditā the nun's garb, which on that very day she had decided to wear. On October 15, the "Vedānta Society Rooms," forming the new quarters of the Vedānta Society of New York, were formally opened. Soon after, avenues of work opened up for Swāmi Turiyānanda, who with his headquarters at Montclair, a few miles from New York, undertook various types of Vedānta work independently, along with assisting Swāmi Abhedānanda by lecturing at the Vedānta Society. Swāmi Vivekānanda too met and talked to his admirers publicly and privately in New York. But he had forebodings that he would not be spared on this mortal plane for long. Said he to Swāmi Abhedānanda, "Well, brother, my days are numbered. I shall live only for three or four years at the most." But a man like him could not on that account sit idle brooding over the end; he must act and act manfully to the last day. So he left for California on November 22 to embark on a long and strenuous tour of teaching and preaching in the west coast, whence he was to return to New York on June 7 next year, absolutely exhausted and ruined in health. During these six months he sowed the seeds of future Vedānta centres in Los Angeles and San Francisco, in which places the students asked for a Swāmi to undertake regular instruction. And so Swāmiji planned to place Swāmi Turiyānanda in California. He wrote to him accordingly, though the latter could not comply just then, being busy with his commitments in New York.

Swāmi Vivekānanda had closely studied Western social institutions and compared them mentally with

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their counterparts in India. The result of this comparative evaluation we find embodied in his thought-provoking and learned treatise, *The East and the West*, which first came out as a serial in the Bengali organ *Udbodhan* and was published as a book in June, 1900.

In the meantime, on the eve of his departure from California, Swāmiji got an offer of 160 acres of land in San Antone Valley, Santa Clara County, California, for a retreat, from Miss Minnie C. Boock, a student of Swāmi Abhedānanda in New York. Swāmiji accepted the offer, but as he himself could not undertake the task of building up this centre, the Shānti Āshrama or Peace Retreat, as it came to be called, he promised to commission Swāmi Turiyānanda for the work. The latter reached Los Angeles in June, 1900, and started pushing on with the preaching work begun by Swāmi Vivekānanda. In the towns and cities of California he was much appreciated, but his real destination was the Shānti Āshrama, where he was to create for the American people an environment for a quiet and unostentatious life of meditation, prayer and austerity. Reaching San Francisco on July 26, he went to the Shānti Āshrama on August 2 with twelve students. It was a hard life in a desolate place without the ordinary amenities, situated on the eastern slope of Mount Hamilton at an elevation of about 2,500 feet. It was twelve miles from the Lick Observatory on Mount Hamilton, fifty miles from the railway station, and three miles from a post office. It was virgin soil surrounded by a forest, with no drinking water near at hand and only one old log cabin. The first appearance was dreary and the first impression dismal. Yet like a true Sannyāsin, Swāmi Turiyānanda turned his attention to making it a replica of an Indian forest retreat. Tents were pitched, duties were allotted, and a life of discipline and spiritual effort was mapped out. The

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Swāmi himself shared all the hardship with the students to live a real Vedāntic life in the midst of exotic surroundings. All records go to show that he was eminently successful in this attempt. And it is the spiritual force generated by the teacher and students of the Shānti Āshrama of those days that still hovers over the Vedānta centres in California, putting faith, hope and energy into every soul and leading them to greater and greater advancement every day.

On June 7, Swāmi Vivekānanda returned to New York to stay in the Vedānta Society Rooms. Though completely run down in health, he started work from June 9, lecturing and holding classes in New York and Detroit till he left America for good on July 20, 1900, to reach Paris on August 1. Here he attended, on invitation, the Congress of the History of Religions and spoke before it in defence of Hinduism. In Paris, again, he made friends with eminent persons. This was followed by a long tour of Europe, whence he came to Cairo. There he had a premonition of Captain Sevier's death. At this he hurried back to India with a view to consoling Mrs. Sevier, and disembarking at Bombay, arrived at the Belur Math on December 9. Here he had confirmation of his foreboding about Captain Sevier, who had passed away at Māyāvati on October 28, 1900. His body had been cremated in the Hindu style at the bottom of a ravine by a streamlet, and according to the wishes of Mrs. Sevier, the ashes were scattered around, so that no mortal sign could remain of that true Vedāntist.

The Swāmi's next step was to go to Māyāvati to console Mrs. Sevier. Accompanied by Swāmis Shivānanda and Sadānanda, he reached the snow-covered Advaita Āshrama via Kāthgodām on January 3, 1901, to stay there till January 18 and return to the Belur Math on January 24. His brief stay at Māyāvati did

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much to impress on the inmates the ideal of Monism and the method of its realisation. On the way back, at Pilibhit, he left behind Swāmi Shivānanda saying, "Each member of the Belur Math should go about preaching and teaching in India, and bring to the General Fund at least two thousand rupees."

The Swāmi had been thinking of vesting the central Math with legal authority to manage property and take care of all other matters connected with the growing organisation. After considering several alternative plans, he at last fixed upon making a Debottar Trust of the Math, and the Trust Deed was executed on January 30, 1901, and registered on February 6. By this Deed Swāmi Vivekānanda vested all the Belur Math properties in a Board of Trustees consisting of Swāmis Brahmānanda, Premānanda, Shivānanda, Sāradānanda, Akhandānanda, Trigunātita, Rāmakrishnānanda, Advaitānanda, Subodhānanda, Abhedānanda and Turiyānanda—all disciples of Shri Rāmakrishna, the Swāmi having deliberately left out his own disciples to guard against any possible legal complication in future. In the Trust Deed there was provision for the election of a President by the Trustees from amongst themselves, to hold office for two years only. The duties of the Trustees comprised the admission and maintenance of the monks of the Order staying at the Math, "propagation and advancement of the cult" of Shri Rāmakrishna, and maintenance and furtherance of the Trust. It will strike the reader that the language of the Deed is a bit jarring at places ; but for this the solicitor was responsible.

After the execution of the Trust, Swāmi Vivekānanda stepped down from the Presidentship of the organisation in favour of Swāmi Brahmānanda (elected President on February 12, 1901) thus divesting himself of all authority. At this time, the local Municipality

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wanted to tax the Math premises on the plea that it was not a religious establishment, but rather a garden-house of Swāmiji. The suit was contested up to the Calcutta High Court, which decreed in favour of the Math on February 23, 1901.

In 1901 he went on a pilgrimage to East Bengal and Assam, and delivered speeches at Dacca and Shillong, though from considerations of health he should have taken a complete rest. In fact, he was ever active, more active than he should have been, till even to the casual observer it became evident that he was preparing to leave this world. Doctors and the brother-disciples forced him to take rest; but a great man's fame is his enemy. Moreover, Swāmi Vivekānanda could not avoid eager and inquisitive visitors, whose questions had to be answered and problems solved. The Swāmi's yearning to finish his work added to the difficulty. He said, "My work must be quick as lightning and strong as a thunderbolt." But mortal frame could not bear such a strain. All the same, he arranged for the worship of Durgā in the image at the Belur Math from October 18 to 21, at which the Holy Mother was present. This elaborate worship conducted with scriptural punctiliousness had a very salutary effect on the Hindu public, since it demonstrated, as nothing else could, that Swāmi Vivekānanda, and along with him his monastery, were religiously inspired and Hindu to the very backbone. Studied against this new background, his foreign travels, his outright condemnation of social evils and his political diatribes seemed now to be aimed at the single objective of rousing the nation to its pristine glory.

As the Swāmi's health deteriorated, he planned to go to Benares for rest and change, for which a palatial villa belonging to Mr. Kāli Krishna Tagore was kindly lent by the owner. Just at this time Mr. Okakura

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and Rev. Oda came from Japan on a visit of pilgrimage and requested Swāmiji to proceed with them to Bodh Gayā. As this accorded with Swāmiji's plan, he accompanied them to that holy place and then left for Benares, to live there during January and February, 1902. Two events at Benares are of special importance.

Some young men, under the leadership of Chāru Chandra Dās (afterwards Swāmi Shubhānanda), Kedār Nāth Maulik (later Swāmi Achalānanda), Jāmini Ranjan Majumdār and others, who had been inspired, through Swāmi Kalyānānanda, by the spiritual message of Shri Rāmakrishna and the new spirit of service as worship preached and demonstrated by Swāmiji, had grouped together to start in the middle of June, 1900, an institution called the Poor Men's Relief Association. It was located in a house rented for five rupees a month at D 32/82 Jangambāri, in the Rāmāpurā quarter of Benares. Through it the young men "endeavoured with their limited means to provide food, shelter and medical aid to destitute pilgrims, helpless widows, and aged persons lying ill on the streets and ghats of the city." It was on June 13, 1900, that Jāmini Ranjan, a penniless youth living on charity as a student of Sanskrit, was moved by the misery of an old woman lying sick on the roadside, unattended and unclaimed. Then and there he initiated this work of selfless service by begging a four-anna piece from a passing gentleman. He then enlisted the co-operation of Chāru Bābu and others to remove the woman to a hospital. Soon after, their enthusiasm germinated into an institution, which was successively shifted to 227 Dashāshwamedh Ghat on February 19, 1901, and to D 38/153 Rāmāpurā on June 2, 1901, where it was during Swāmiji's visit to Benares. Swāmiji was pleased with their zeal and spirit, which were reminiscent of the days of St. Francis of Assisi. He blessed them and wrote an appeal to accompany

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the first report of their Association, renamed later as the Rāmakrishna Home of Service in compliance with the wishes of Swāmiji, so as to fit in with the new outlook inculcated by him.

The second event was the contribution of a sum of five hundred rupees by the Maharaja of Bhingā for the establishment of a monastery in the holy city. The Swāmi accepted the money.

He returned to the Belur Math before the annual birthday ceremony of Shri Rāmakrishna in 1902 and again entered headlong into his work of teaching and training. Discussions and classes followed almost without a break, till he again fell seriously ill. Even in the midst of this, he planned with the help of Swāmi Vijnānānanda for a large temple of Shri Rāmakrishna at Belur, and talked with Swāmi Premānanda about a college for Vedic studies. Nor was his promise to the Maharaja of Bhingā forgotten; he tried to induce some one to take up the work. When none else was willing, he fixed upon Swāmi Shivānanda. Much as the latter would like to attend on Swāmiji during his illness, he was almost forced to go immediately.

Arriving at Benares, Swāmi Shivānanda first stayed at the Poor Men's Relief Association; but he soon removed to a rented house in the Laksā quarter of the city, where he formally inaugurated the Rāmakrishna Advaita Āshrama on Friday, July 4, 1902, the very day on which Swāmi Vivekānanda was to enter into Mahāsamādhi at the Belur Math. Thus the Advaita Āshrama at Benares, the city of Shiva, was Swāmi Vivekānanda's last handiwork; and it was a fitting close to a life so dynamic, inspiring and self-forgetful, full of sympathy, spiritual fervour and unobstructed vision as Swāmiji's—qualities that the Hindus generally associate with the great God Shiva. His mother believed that Vireshwara Shiva of Benares was to be born as her eldest child, and

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his followers are convinced that he had in him much of Shiva—that God of unquestioning compassion and unalloyed illumination, whose favourite resort is Benares, the place where pious Hindus wend their way at the close of their earthly career. And had not Shri Rāmakrishna visualised him as one of the seven Rishis or seers who, though ever merged in the highest vision, had yet the spiritual distinction of preserving their individuality, thus forging a link between heaven and earth!

But was that the end of Swāmi Vivekānanda's work of spiritual ministration or just the beginning of a mighty regeneration? His life was very short; but the power released by it was so tremendous that it created a revolution in the world of thought. In terms of concrete achievement, so far as permanent and semi-permanent institutions are concerned, we saw that a number of them were ushered in between 1893 and 1899. The Swāmi's second visit to America inaugurated the Vedānta work in California in general, and at the Shānti Āshrama in particular. After his second return, India witnessed the growth of a number of centres. To the Home of Service and the Advaita Āshrama of Benares must be added the centres at Allahabad and Kankhal (Hardwār), both in Uttar Pradesh, and that at Dacca in East Bengal, all of which are traceable to his inspiration. With regard to the founding of the Mission's work at the last-named place, we have it in the Second General Report of the Mission: "This branch of the Rāmakrishna Mission was started as early as 1899, when Swāmis Virajānanda and Prakāshānanda, deputed by Swāmi Vivekānanda, visited these parts and by lectures and religious discourses created an interest in the message of Shri Rāmakrishna and sowed the first seeds of the work. Under their auspices a Society was started, in which religious sittings were regularly held." The

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spirit was kept up by occasional visits of other Swāmis, of whom Abhayānanda's was the most noteworthy. The appearance of Swāmi Vivekānanda with his party in 1901 stirred the imagination of the Dacca public, which gave the Society a greater co-operation.

The centre at Allahabad had its inception from the private efforts of some enthusiastic followers of Swāmi Vivekānanda, who started in the city the Brahmavādin Club, where pious people gathered to read religious literature and discuss spiritual topics. To this Club came Swāmi Vijnānānanda in 1900 to give it a fresh impetus, till with public support he succeeded in erecting in the year 1908 a permanent building for a Rāmakrishna Math in the Muthiganj area of the city. Close by it he started in a separate house, in October, 1910, a Sevāshrama, or Home of Service. Keeping in touch with him, the Brahmavādin Club too continued its existence for some time.

The Rāmakrishna Mission Sevāshrama of Kankhal had also a humble but romantic beginning, on the same sure foundation of unflagging faith and ardour. On the eve of Swāmi Vivekānanda's departure for the West for the second time, Swāmi Kalyānānanda left the Belur Math on June 3, 1899, for Benares, where he met the future youthful organisers of the Home of Service—Chāru Chandra, Kedār Nāth and others—who took the concept of practical Vedānta from him. From there he proceeded further west to meet by chance Swāmi Swarupānanda at the Jaipur railway station. Just then Kishengarh was in the grip of a famine. The two Swāmis dropped their idea of pilgrimage to take in hand the service of the helpless. As after a while Swarupānanda had to leave for his place of work at Māyāvati, Kalyānānanda stayed on at Kishengarh to complete the work, which took one year. In the latter part of the work, when he fell ill, he was helped by

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Swāmis Nirmalānanda and Ātmānanda, deputed from the Headquarters. During the closing months he took charge of some orphans, whose number rose to 50 boys and 20 girls in November, 1900. From Kishengarh Swāmi Kalyānānanda came back to Belur to meet his guru just returned from the West. Swāmi Vivekānanda, who from personal experience of suffering knew the helplessness of monks living at Hardwār and near-by places, told Swāmi Kalyānānanda at the Belur Math, "My boy, can you do something for the ailing monks at Hardwār and Rishikesh? There is none to look after them when they fall ill. Go and serve them." The disciple readily agreed. And to test his sincerity, the teacher said, "If I am in need of money and for that I sell you as a slave, will you submit without a word?" The disciple replied, "Yes, Sir." Commissioned for this task, Kalyānānanda first went to Māyāvati to consult Swarupānanda, who encouraged him heartily and accompanied him to Nainitāl to collect a little amount, just enough to start with. In June, 1901, Kalyānānanda began his work at Kankhal, then a mere village by the side of the pilgrim town of Hardwār. Two rooms hired at a monthly rent of three rupees served as his dispensary, indoor ward, bedroom, office and everything; and his stock of medicines was contained in a small box. Living on alms, the Swāmi distributed medicines not only among those who came to him, but also among those others who could not stir out of their huts. From the first published account it appears that the institution spent in September, 1901 less than twenty-eight rupees and yet that must have been a considerable sum in those early days! As Swāmi Kalyānānanda struggled on, there came to his help Suraj Rāo, of Mahārāshtra, who had resigned his post in the army to become a disciple of Swāmi Vivekānanda. When he first met the Swāmi in Madras in 1897, he was charmed by his per-

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sonality, and would have followed him then and there, but was advised to meet him again in Calcutta. So Suraj Rāo suddenly appeared at the Belur Math in 1901, and refused to take food until he had seen Swāmiji. "So you want to become a monk?" inquired the Swāmi. "No, I want to become your servant," was the prompt reply. The firm resolve (in Sanskrit, *nishchaya*) of Suraj Rāo, the soldier, endeared him to Swāmiji, who accepted him and called him Swāmi Nishchayānanda. The story is told of his daring devotion to duty—how he was bringing a cow from Ālambāzār to the Belur Math in a boat, and when she in a fright jumped into the Ganges, he too leapt into the rushing river and held on to her tether till he landed her safe in the monastery! Towards the end of 1901 the new Swāmi joined Swāmi Kalyānānanda to become his trusted lieutenant. Ignoring physical hardship, he conducted for some time next year a branch dispensary at Rishikesh, fifteen miles from Kankhal—walking all the way there and back every day.

Thus did the Math and Mission march on to win fresh laurels at every turn. India was raised from her torpor by Swāmiji's mighty message of practical Vedānta. The West too gained immensely from it. Its thought was enriched and outlook widened, as is evident from the writings of contemporary philosophers and the new movements like Christian Science and New Thought. But what did future humanity gain from him? Swāmi Vivekānanda the man was gone from the human arena. But Swāmi Vivekānanda the spirit lived for ever to consolidate his conquest of the world to the cause of Vedānta, the aim of which has been summed up by Christopher Isherwood in *Vedānta for the Western World* (p. 1) as follows: "First, that man's real nature is divine. Second, that the aim of human life is to realize this divine nature. Third, that all religions are

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essentially in agreement." The task before the organisation created by Swāmiji is nothing less than the establishment, through a spiritual regeneration, of a real and lasting unity of mankind in which divinity will find its full play. It is the Vedic dictum, "Truth is One, but sages call It by various names," that forms the rock-bottom of the Order. And as Dr. Floyd H. Ross, Professor of World Religions, University of Southern California, puts it, "The oneness of mankind is something which modern man everywhere needs to learn if he is to move creatively into one world where the richness of divinity does not mean an anarchy of foolish competition; but each person needs to find the meaning of that oneness in his own selfhood before he can go far in helping to build 'One World'" (*A. B. Patrikā*, September 19, 1954). And to this may be added the words of Romain Rolland, "Religion, for Vivekānanda, is synonymous with Universalism of the spirit. And it is not until religious conceptions have attained to this universalism that religion is fully realised. For contrary to the belief of all who know it not, religion is a matter for the future far more than for the past. It has only just begun" (*The Life of Vivekānanda and the Universal Gospel*, pp. 259-60). Both the quotations are correct to the extent that, without denying either the fulness or richness of individual religious lives in the past, Swāmi Vivekānanda wanted to impart into future religion a varied dynamic urge calculated to benefit the individual as well as humanity as a whole at the same time. His motto was *"Ātmano mokshārtham, jagaddhitāya cha"*—for one's own salvation and for the good of the world. His unique contribution was to remove the gulf between the two standpoints—individual and universal. "Broad as the sky and deep as the ocean," was a favourite expression of his, which can very well sum up his own

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personality. He was a religious man in the old sense of the term, with the added qualification that work for him was worship. There was no split in his personality, and he did not stand for two different ideals for the East and the West. Though circumstances compelled him to prescribe different remedies for the two, he really stood for an integrated life both in India and abroad, and the ideal in both places was the realisation of God. Swāmi Vivekānanda the spirit stood for spirituality alone ; life mattered so far only as it meant an endeavour for the "manifestation of the perfection already in man." It was wrong according to him, either to dichotomise life and Spirit or to separate the One from the All.

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IN THE LEADER'S FOOTSTEPS

(1902—1912)

The passing away of a leader like Swāmi Vivekānanda is nothing less than a stunning blow to any organisation still in its swaddling-clothes. But the Almighty Power that provides for all, made plans long ahead for the sustenance and growth of this budding movement. The successor had already been appointed. It happened thus. When Shri Rāmakrishna was disgusted with talking to worldlings and longed for pure, kindred souls, the Divine Mother assured him of their coming; and a few days before the visit of Swāmi Brahmānanda (then Rākhāl), he saw in a vision a child being put into his lap by the Mother with the words, "This is your son." In consternation the Master protested, "How is that? A son for me!" "Not a son in the ordinary sense," explained the Mother, "but an all-renouncing mind-born son." When Rākhāl came, the Master had no difficulty in recognising him as the boy in the vision. That was the stature of Swāmi Brahmānanda, a spiritual genius of the highest calibre, with his mind ever indrawn and yet possessed of a remarkable capacity for administration, which once led the Master to remark, "Rākhāl can rule a kingdom." Swāmi Vivekānanda and his brother-disciples took that utterance literally; and even during the lifetime of the Master Narendra once said to his brother-disciples, "Let us make Rākhāl our Raja from today." All agreed, and when the Master was apprised of this, he remarked, "Well done." So from that day Rākhāl came to be known as Raja to his brother-disciples, and a little later as Mahārāj to the whole organisation. And we have

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seen that the leader also prepared the ground for Mahārāj in all possible ways. From the time of Swāmi Vivekānanda's return from the West, he made Mahārāj the virtual executive head of the Order. From boyhood they had been friends, and Swāmi Brahmānanda had all along acknowledged Swāmiji's leadership. The latter too had the greatest trust in Mahārāj, so that the change-over was smooth and natural, without any detriment to the spirit and efficiency of the organisation.

Swāmi Brahmānanda had many able assistants, of whom two at least—Swāmis Premānanda and Sāradānanda—figure prominently in the post-Vivekānanda days of the organisation. The Belur Math was the parent institution where novices came for training and inspiration, and pious souls for solace and spiritual food. It was Swāmi Premānanda or Bāburām of Shri Rāmakrishna, who took in hand, with the President's cognisance, the immediate responsibility of talking to them, removing their doubts, making them interested in the Math and Mission, providing sacramental food and lodging for them, and managing the Math in every way, down to the minutest detail. He was the "mother" of the Math, so to say, and showed a true mother's heart in dealing with all. For had not Shri Rāmakrishna declared that Bāburām had in him something of Shri Rādhā, who was love incarnate? He lived a very simple and unostentatious life. His one endeavour was to serve the Master and make others join that service in the right spirit. The Math was the Master's in the fullest sense, and Swāmi Premānanda, as the Master's steward, had no special claim on it. Through his example and attitude to work as service of the Master, others imbibed the belief that every inch of the Math was holy ground, sanctified by the footsteps of the Master, who was present everywhere and watched the inmates at work. The lawns

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had to be kept free from weeds for Shri Rāmakrishna to walk on. The flowers in the garden bloomed for him. The dressing of fruits and vegetables, the feeding of cows, the cleaning of the ground, the scouring of vessels were but so many forms of his worship; everything had to be done with that devotional fervour. Life as a whole was thus turned into a continuous meditation, just as Swāmi Vivekānanda wanted it to be. To be with Swāmi Premānanda was to have a direct contact, as it were, with the Master himself. Above all, his love surged through all his actions, and his utterances drew everybody to Shri Rāmakrishna.

And there was Swāmi Sāradānanda—Sharat of the Master—as the Secretary of the Rāmakrishna Math and Mission, an indefatigable worker and easily the most balanced man in the whole Order. With his gentle manner, musical voice, reasoned talk, facile pen, tender heart and, above all, his even temper under all circumstances, born of deep spiritual introspection, he was the sheet-anchor of the organisation. Shri Rāmakrishna had seen him in the company of Jesus Christ, which perhaps explains why at St. Peter's in Rome, Sāradānanda fell into a trance. Upon his strength of character was to be erected the Master's vast edifice. Once he had sat playfully in Sharat's lap, and on rising up had remarked, "I was testing how much weight he could bear." And on one occasion Swāmi Vivekānanda, finding that he remained unmoved in the face of a bitter attack, remarked that he was cold-blooded like a fish. Sharat was personally chosen by him for his onerous post.

These stalwarts, then, addressed themselves to the task at hand, and the Rāmakrishna Math and Mission began to advance. It was indeed a combined effort not only of these three, but of others also both at Belur and elsewhere. But true to the spirit of a religious

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and philanthropic organisation, all the units bowed to the will of the Head without any claim to personal credit. Hence we may be excused if at times we concentrate on the movements of Mahārāj in order to explain the history of the next two decades during which he symbolised the organisation.

Benares, where he went in the middle of 1903, received his first attention. Swāmi Shivānanda had established the Rāmakrishna Advaita Āshrama there just a year before. Swāmi Shivānanda acted vigorously to extend the activities of the Āshrama and make it useful to the public. He published three books in Hindi—a translation of Swāmi Vivekānanda's Chicago lectures, his discourses with a disciple and the *Words of the Master* by Swāmi Brahmānanda. He also conducted for some time a free primary school. But public response was inadequate. The initial donation of five hundred rupees was soon exhausted. Inured to hardship from early youth, he could carry on under trying circumstances for a long time; but a Rāmakrishna centre certainly deserved a firmer foundation. Swāmi Brahmānanda, during his stay of one month there, agreed with Swāmi Shivānanda that the Āshrama should be placed on a better footing with its own land and building. They both planned accordingly; but for some time to come the Advaita Āshrama still continued to be a place of hard spiritual struggle for the young novices as well as for its head.

Swāmi Brahmānanda's next care was the Poor Men's Relief Association, or the Rāmakrishna Home of Service, about which Swāmi Vivekānanda had said to him, "Keep an eye on this institution." The institution had sincere and self-sacrificing workers no doubt, and was gaining in popularity; but it required the guidance of some central body and a permanent home for its expanding activities. The management too felt

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the need and suggested to Mahārāj that it should be amalgamated with the Rāmakrishna Mission. A public meeting, called with his concurrence on September 23, 1903, at the Carmichael Library, to confirm this decision of the Managing Committee, acclaimed it with joy; and soon the institution became an integral part of the Mission to be rechristened the Rāmakrishna Mission Home of Service. With this affiliation, the future of the Home became assured, and it launched forth into a life of diverse and fruitful activity. Soon at the instance of Swāmi Brahmānanda, Upendra Nārāyan Deb of Entally, Calcutta, a devotee of Swāmi Vivekānanda, contributed four thousand rupees, to which was added another sum of two thousand—the savings of his whole life—by Tārini Charan Pāl, to form a nucleus for its permanent premises. Finally, as if to prove that the unexpected happens when a genuine cause stirs people's imagination, the owner of the property on which the Advaita Āshrama was located, proposed to Swāmi Shivānanda to sell the property for only six thousand rupees if he took it; but to no one else would he give it for such a small amount. On the Swāmi's advice, Chāru Chandra purchased the vacant land for the Home of Service, while the house with a little contiguous land was purchased for the Advaita Āshrama. This was on the 31st July, 1906. Mahārāj laid the foundation of the Home on April 6, 1908. On May 16, 1910, the Home moved out of its rented house at Rāmāpurā to this permanent abode. We learn from the first General Report of the Mission, published in 1913, that by that time the Home of Service had an outdoor dispensary and an indoor section for fifty patients, with office, library, kitchen, etc.; and the monthly expenditure averaged about five hundred rupees.

We referred to this centre in the last chapter, and

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we have entered into these details here again only to show how, under Heaven's guidance, men, and not money, make things happen. This case is also illustrative of the way in which other Math and Mission centres were built up. Their present structures may be imposing; but each brick or stone represents so much sacrifice on the part of the pioneers who felt, dreamt, struggled and died. From their ashes sprang fresh dreams and ideals to capture other hearts similarly tuned, till three generations of poor, helpless workers have brought about an achievement in which any organisation can take pride.

From Benares, Mahārāj moved up, about the end of September, 1903, to Kankhal, where we left Swāmi Kalyānānanda engaged in his labour of love. This now consisted in serving the monastic patients through the indoor and outdoor departments, and poor children through a free primary school, receiving in return only taunts from the community of local monks, who considered such work degrading to holy men wearing the ochre robe of renunciation. Mahārāj had to be accommodated in one of the three humble huts that the Sevāshrama (Home of Service) could boast of. He had received a donation of two thousand, three hundred rupees for the Sevāshrama, out of which a thousand and a half was spent in February, 1903, for purchasing about five acres of land with a well in it. And it was only in 1905 that a building was completed with funds provided by Mr. Bhajanlāl Lohiā and Mr. Harsahāimall Sukdevdās of Calcutta.

After a few weeks, Mahārāj went down to Vrindāban, where Swāmi Turiyānanda was spending his days in austere spiritual practices. When we last parted from the latter, he was building up the Shānti Āshrama in California as its presiding spirit. With meditation at nightfall before a blazing fire of crackling

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logs under the canopy of heaven, living in tents and log houses, repeating the Mother's name ever and anon, eating simple meals cooked by themselves while enthralling spiritual talks flowed from Swāmi Turiyānanda's lips, studying the Hindu scriptures under him and living all the time in divine communion far from the din and bustle of cities, the American men and women assembled there had a taste of real religious life. But the Swāmi's health broke down under the strain, and the news of Swāmi Vivekānanda's illness made him hurry back to India with the permission of Swāmiji. But the two were never to meet again on this earth. It was at Rangoon on his way to Calcutta that Swāmi Turiyānanda got the tragic news of Swāmiji's passing away. Broken-hearted, he entered the Belur Math with a determination no more to return to the West, but rather to spend the rest of his life in quest of God, away from human habitations. A few days' rest at the Math was enough for him to resume the life of austere self-study which he had abandoned in 1894 at the call of the leader. Neither advancing age nor memory of comfortable days in the early part of his stay in America could damp the fire in his heart, for he was a veritable lion among men. Swāmi Brahmānanda stayed with him for some days to enjoy his company and taste again the bliss of divine communion in solitude that he had experienced in his earlier life. After that he started back for Calcutta, halting first at Vindhyāchal to visit the Goddess there, and then at Allahabad to spend a few days in the company of Swāmi Vijnānānanda, who was still at the Brahmavādin Club. He reached the Belur Math in November, 1903.

This may be interpreted as a tour of inspection and guidance by the President of the Order. In a material sense it was so. But in a spiritual sense it was much more than that. The President of the Belur

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Math is not merely an executive head; he is also its highest spiritual guide. And the history of the constitutional development of the organisation will show that the logic of circumstances freed the President increasingly from paying attention to the details of work, until he became the spiritual leader *par excellence* without extraneous encumbrances. For the President is the guru, the spiritual preceptor, who has to mould the inner life of the monks and novices of the Order as also that of the lay devotees—a huge responsibility in itself. And the Rāmakrishna Math and Mission, which do not regard their social service as a sort of humanism but rather as a means for the realisation of the God in the ignorant, the afflicted and the spiritually poor among men of all nations, cannot but lay the greatest stress on the spiritual side of life. The freer they can make their President from administrative entanglements, the happier they feel. This, however, does not mean that his executive experience is of no avail; for he is always there to preside over the meetings of the central body and help it with his practical knowledge and mature judgment. This primacy of spirituality and division of functions were in a way actualised by Swāmi Brahmānanda before they needed to be codified. In his last tour through North India, we find him spending days in the company of his monks and in solitary places for self-culture. Even while at Belur, he paid more attention to building up character and generating mutual love and respect than enforcing discipline and conducting meetings. In fact, it was a task for comparatively junior monks of the Order to persuade him to attend punctually any meeting relating to management. The other senior monks made no grievance of this, since they were perfectly ready to obey him even without formal procedure. When Swāmi Shuddhānanda, noted for his exactitude in everything, deplored such neglect of formalities,

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Swāmi Sāradānanda silenced him saying, "Don't you know we have all given our power of attorney to Mahārāj?" It is difficult to bring home the efficacy of this method to any one who has not actually passed through the formative processes of a monastic order growing to its full stature through spontaneous love, faith and obedience.

And this brings us to the Holy Mother again. We have not mentioned her for a long time. She was not a member of the Rāmakrishna monastery ; she was on no committee ; she had no constitutional voice anywhere. Still, was she less powerful for all that, or was her contribution to the building up of the Order any the less considerable? Had she not held fast to the Master when darkness gathered all around? Had she not prayed for the monastery in its days of uncertainty? And did she not direct the lives of its members in every way in the days of its progress? After Shri Rāmakrishna it was to her that all monastic and lay members looked up for comfort and guidance. After Swāmi Vivekānanda's passing, she shared with Swāmi Brahmānanda the duty of initiating the aspirants into the religious life ; nay, her share of the duty was the more onerous one. For while Swāmi Brahmānanda, like Shri Rāmakrishna, picked and chose, she in her compassion accepted all. Her native village of Jayrāmbāti was a place of pilgrimage for all. Her word was a command, her wishes imperative and her judgment unquestionable—be the person concerned a Swāmi Vivekānanda or a Swāmi Brahmānanda. These spiritual stalwarts, when approaching her holy presence, went through all possible processes of physical and mental purification, and showed visible signs of utter humility before her, though to others they themselves were heroes, needing no purification or self-abasement anywhere. The Holy Mother's spirituality was transparently clear to the most vicious,

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and her affection supremely touching to the most hardened soul. Had not Shri Rāmakrishna declared her to be his divine energy? One function of hers was to solve the spiritual problems of her disciples, both lay and monastic; her other function was to influence indirectly the working of the organisation for its good. One hint of disapproval or approval from her was enough to change a course of action or give an impetus to it. Any monk taken to task by the seniors might take refuge at her feet with the expectation of pardon or more favourable consideration. If any one felt hesitant to engage himself heart and soul in some work of the Mission, she was sure to allay his doubts or allow him to make up his mind for a while in solitary divine communion, from which the monk would return spiritually refreshed. She did not actually confer formal Sannyāsa on any one, that task being reserved for Swāmi Brahmānanda and others. But she handed the monastic garb to many and asked them to have the formal part done by Mahārāj. They too cherished that favour of hers as the greatest blessing of their new and arduous life.

Yet her own needs had to be attended to; for after the Master's passing away, she was extremely indigent and helpless. The Master, of course, had consoled her during his last days with the assurance that Narendra and others would take as much care of her as they were taking of him. But in the earlier years, Narendra and his brother-disciples themselves led a precarious existence. Gradually things took a better turn, and the monks and devotees served her personally or defrayed her expenses to the best of their capacity. Of those who served the Mother most during the early years, Swāmi Yogānanda ranks the highest; for, as Swāmi Vivekānanda once remarked, a man of more immaculate character was not to be found anywhere. Swāmi Yogānanda was often to be found in the Mother's retinue,

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and on him she could wholly depend. But the Swāmi underwent such hard austerities at times that he soon became a victim of chronic diarrhoea, which almost made him an invalid, to die at the house of Balarām Bose, Calcutta, on March 28, 1899. The Mother was terribly shocked at this first great mishap in the Order of the Master, and remarked, "A brick has dropped out of the building; now it is the turn of the rest." Swāmi Vivekānanda too said, "A beam has fallen; now the rafters also will come off by degrees." Such was their estimate of Yogānanda!

After his passing away, Swāmi Trigunātita stepped into his shoes for a while to attend upon the Mother. When, however, he left for San Francisco in November, 1902, to take up Swāmi Turiyānanda's work, Swāmi Sāradānanda filled up the vacancy, to serve her till her last day with a faith and devotion that struck everybody with wonder. By his example, many young men were slowly drawn into her company, and Jayrāmbāti, her birth-place, became a monastery, as it were, though it was not formally recognised as such till after her passing away.

This was an onerous duty for Swāmi Sāradānanda. But not baffled in any way by the necessity of having to supply all the earthly needs of the Mother through private collections, and not from Math or Mission funds, he found time and energy to engage in other activities. Soon after his return from the West, he had plunged into public work through classes on the scriptures and lectures on the import of the new message. Besides this, he undertook tours to distant places in India. He became permanently associated with the Vivekānanda Society, started in Calcutta on August 23, 1902, by a group of young men assembled in a meeting in memory of Swāmiji at the Albert Hall, over which he presided. Although the Society was not a part of the parent organ-

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isation, the monks of the Order, such as Swāmis Sāradānanda and Shuddhānanda had a close connection with it, nay, in a sense, it was their creation, and it ran under their guidance and patronage.

The care of the Bengali journal *Udbodhan* also devolved on him after the departure of Swāmi Trigunātita for America. His departure had been planned earlier, but Swāmi Vivekānanda's demise postponed it, so that he could reach San Francisco only on January 2, 1903. With his robust health and buoyant enthusiasm, Swāmi Trigunātita had entered heart and soul into the task of conducting the *Udbodhan,* which was very exacting in every way. At times he had not only to write and collect articles, but canvass subscribers, have his meals where he could, compose copy for the press and even nurse the compositors at their homes when they fell ill, or cajole them from home to their place of duty when they felt disinclined to work. Soon it became apparent that the actual return in terms of work and money was not commensurate with the labour and worry involved in running the press from which the magazine was printed. As a consequence, the press was sold off even during Swāmi Vivekānanda's lifetime; but the periodical still continued on its chequered career, riding out the storms under the care of Swāmi Trigunātita. With his departure from India, the problem became acute, so much so that it was seriously proposed to discontinue the magazine. But both Swāmis Brahmānanda and Sāradānanda were against it. Fortunately, to assist in this uphill work of making the magazine self-supporting, they had Swāmi Shuddhānanda, a young monk of scholarly habits, with an abundance of dash as well as steadiness and power of literary expression, who had been associated with the *Udbodhan* in its early days. Also, at the time of leaving his post, the first Editor saw to it

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that some issues of the journal were printed in advance. These were points favourable to its continuance. A friendly offer now put it on even keel. Its office was still at No. 14 Rām Chandra Maitra Lane, in a house owned by Girindra Mohan Basāk, from whose press too it was printed. As the death sentence was about to be passed, he suggested that the periodical should have another chance to pay its way. So by common consent the *Udbodhan* entered its fifth year with Girindra Bābu himself as the publisher, and Swāmis Sāradānanda, Shuddhānanda and others looking after its literary side. With the death of Girindra Bābu, however, in November, 1906, the office had to be shifted to 30 Bose-para Lane, Bāghbāzār.

In between, there appeared a silver lining to the cloud; the violent nationalistic reaction and demand for annulment which followed the partition of Bengal in 1905 created a great demand for the invigorating works of Swāmi Vivekānanda. This gave a fillip both to the *Udbodhan* and the sale department of Swāmiji's books. Finding the state of the funds rather promising, Swāmi Sāradānanda began to plan a great venture: he would have a permanent building for the Bengali publications. Another need for the house was to provide a suitable place for the Holy Mother to live in whenever she came to Calcutta, for a rented house had too often proved both costly and inconvenient. An incentive for pushing on with the plan had already been supplied by Kedār Chandra Dās, a straw merchant and devotee, who had made a gift of a small plot of land, measuring about 2,340 square feet, at 12-13 Gopāl Chandra Neogi Lane, Bāghbāzār, to the Belur Math on July 18, 1906. On this land the Swāmi proposed to raise a two-storied brick-built house, the ground floor of which would be reserved for the publications, and the first floor for the Holy Mother. When the

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execution of the plan began, he had only Rs. 2,700 in the publication department. As the money soon got exhausted, he borrowed a sum of Rs. 5,700 and later some smaller amounts, to finish the building in 1908, with ten rooms in all, and the *Udbodhan* Office removed here by November. The house was sanctified by the Holy Mother's presence in it on May 23, 1909. On December 18 of that year, another small plot, about 900 square feet in area, was added to it at a cost of Rs. 1,850, on which again were added in 1915 some more rooms. Though formally it is the Rāmakrishna Math, Bāghbāzār, the house is now generally referred to either as the Mother's House or as the *Udbodhan* Office, sometimes familiarly shortened into the "Udbodhan".

At this time, the Sister Niveditā Girls' School too claimed a substantial portion of Swāmi Sāradānanda's personal attention. After starting the institution on an experimental basis with unmarried, married and even widowed girls, and working it for about eight months, the Sister became convinced that she had endeared herself to the public and the guardians sufficiently to venture into a bigger and more permanent scheme, for which funds were not available in India. And hence, as we saw, she sailed for the West with Swāmi Vivekānanda for collecting money there. She returned in the beginning of 1902 to restart her school with fifty girls, when Miss Christine Greenstidel, a devoted disciple of Swāmiji, joined hands with her. Swāmi Sāradānanda helped the institution with advice and also money aid, and by inducing the guardians to place their wards under the Sister's care. Now and then he also held scriptural classes there for the benefit of local women.

Along with these and other activities that Swāmi Sāradānanda had to fulfil as a matter of course

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as the Secretary of the Mission, he had semi-official connection with various other institutions that thrived under his patronage. We mentioned the Vivekānanda Society. In June, 1903, he started on Mechhuābāzār Street a home for students, of which he was the President. It had to be closed after a year, mostly for want of suitable accommodation. In addition, he was the life-long President of the Rāmakrishna Samiti Anāth Bhāndār, an orphanage started at Bowbāzār in 1904.

It will not be out of place to mention here that this attempt at training students in a home or Āshrama under the loving care of monks was not the first of its kind in the Order. We are familiar with the orphanage at Sārgāchhi. And we have it from the Belur Math Diary that on March 11, 1900, there were six boys there under the care of Swāmi Shuddhānanda. These boys from the families of devotees were admitted in accordance with a clause of the Belur Math Rules framed by Swāmiji, which reads thus:

"Those boys whom their parents or guardians will, of their own accord, send to this Math for training, or those who are orphans, will also be admitted into this Math and trained, but shall not be counted as members. The question of marrying or not marrying after the completion of their training will be left to their option."

We shall see as we proceed that this idea gave birth to a number of Students' Homes. But then, they came to be organised mostly under the Mission and not the Math; and the question of the boys' ever embracing the monastic life was entirely left out of account. In addition, homes for girls also were to be built in future.

All this time the Math and Mission were expanding through the momentum imparted by the life and teachings of Swāmi Vivekānanda. In the monastery at Castle Kernan, Madras, Swāmi Rāmakrishnānanda worked with his characteristic zeal and earnestness till

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the 17th November, 1907, after which "the Mission centre was finally established in a building erected with funds raised for the purpose by the public of Madras and made over to the Rāmakrishna Mission for its use as the South Indian headquarters." The lines are quoted from the First General Report of the Rāmakrishna Mission, covering the period ending with 1912, up to which year the terms Rāmakrishna Math and Mission do not seem to have been used very carefully. But to this topic we shall revert in due course. For the present we follow the footsteps of Swāmi Rāmakrishnānanda, to whose indefatigable labours in the midst of hardships the consolidation of the Rāmakrishna movement in South India was due. For obvious reasons, we cannot elaborate the biographical incidents, though they are interesting and throw a flood of light on the early days of pioneering. The reader will have to satisfy himself with the mere statement that the Swāmi took up the work with such faith and devotion that although he could not show any immediate resounding result in the material sense of the term, and although he was working himself towards a premature death, the spiritual capital that he accumulated and transmitted to his successors was sufficient to build up in future huge institutions that were beyond the imagination of people of the earlier generation. Into that glorious history we shall enter in a subsequent chapter. Here let us have a passing look at the amazing mode of life of Swāmi Rāmakrishnānanda himself.

After the death of Biligiri early in 1902, his house, Castle Kernan, was put up for sale by auction. The Swāmi and the devotees would have much liked to have the house permanently for the Math. As, however, that was entirely beyond their means, it was thought that some friend might purchase it, so as to allow the Math to continue in a portion of it. But the bidding went

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up and up, till it was absolutely out of their hands. And yet, as hope receded step by step, and a devotee dolefully reported the developments to the Swāmi, he simply asked the devotee not to worry, since it did not matter who had the property so long as he had the Master with him. As for his personal needs, they were few, and to live somewhere with the Master was a simple affair. However, the transfer of ownership made no difference to him, for the new owner, a landholder, also allowed him the same privilege, though later, when the house was being remodelled, the Swāmi had to move from the main building to one or other of the outhouses, where he lived for some more years amidst personal ordeals, financial embarrassment, gruelling heat and tireless labour. By 1903 some funds were collected for putting up a permanent structure. Then a student of his, Kondia Chetty, donated a small piece of land on Brodies Road at Mylapore, in the southern part of the city. The Swāmi shifted in 1906 to a rented house in that quarter, to be near the Math building under construction. About this time two young men who were cousins, Rāmaswāmi Iyengār (or Rāmu) and Rāmānujāchāri, who had met Swāmi Vivekānanda, "felt an inner urge to come close to Swāmi Rāmakrishnānanda and place themselves under his intimate guidance." They also began to share the responsibilities of the Math. Through their joint effort the financial worry was removed from the Swāmi's life. The home for the Master on the donated land was finished in 1907, and on the 17th November the Swāmi came to reside there permanently.

All this while Swāmi Rāmakrishnānanda moved about everywhere, delivering his Master's message to all receptive souls. His visits to Bangalore, Rangoon and Trivandrum were fruitful in the sense that in course

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of time the enthusiasm he created gave rise to permanent centres in those places.

In Bangalore there existed a Vedānta Society at Ulsoor, which invited the Swāmi to preach. He arrived there on July 19, 1903, and gave a course of seven lectures as also several class talks. He also visited Bangalore the next year and did similar work, as a result of which a Rāmakrishna Āshrama was established at the Fort, of which Swāmi Ātmānanda was put in charge in 1904, to be succeeded by Swāmi Bodhānanda in 1906. When the latter was sent next year to America, Swāmi Vimalānanda took his place. They were all disciples of Swāmi Vivekānanda. Swāmi Nirmalānanda was in charge when a permanent home for the Āshrama was built on a plot of thirteen acres of land on Bull Temple Road, surrounded by flower plants and fruit trees, which was opened by Swāmi Brahmānanda on January 20, 1909. Swāmi Somānanda, another disciple of Swāmiji, now joined Swāmi Nirmalānanda to extend the work to Mysore.

Rangoon too had a Rāmakrishna Sevā Samiti, at whose invitation Swāmi Rāmakrishnānanda went there in 1905, reaching the city on March 20. The time, however, was not ripe for any permanent centre just then. The sojourn was of an exploratory character, though full of great promise for the future. The Swāmi's visit to Trivandrum also in the spring of 1903 had been equally successful in bringing into existence a Vedānta Society, though the permanent monastery of the Rāmakrishna Order had to wait till 1924 for its establishment under the fostering care of Swāmi Nirmalānanda, who, by the way, was instrumental in founding several other centres in Malabār.

Some of the speeches of Swāmi Rāmakrishnānanda were published in book form and thus laid the foundation of another publication centre of the organisation—

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at Mylapore, Madras. The first book came out in 1908; it was *The Universe and Man*. Other books followed in succession.

Side by side, some educational activities were springing up under the spiritual ministration of the Swāmi. Despite his meagre resources and his own precarious living, "he gave shelter to a poor college boy of Mysore, suddenly orphaned by plague. He then told Rāmaswāmi and Rāmānujāchāri of his heart's desire to find help for the poor students, for whom he felt so much." The cousins succeeded in persuading their friends and relatives to give the students recommended by him one meal a week by turns. Soon this "led to the starting of a small boarding house to accommodate these students. . . . Dr. M. C. Nanjunda Rāo, an ardent admirer of Swāmi Vivekānanda, gave a small house of his own in Keshava Perumāl South Mada Street, Mylapore, free of rent" (*Rāmakrishna Mission Students' Home Golden Jubilee Souvenir*, pp. 60, 61). It was here that Swāmi Rāmakrishnānanda inaugurated the Home on February 17, 1905, with Rāmaswāmi Iyengār as the Founder-Secretary and custodian of the boys. The object of the institution was to give free board and lodging to poor boys and "to secure for them the supervision and religious influence of the Swāmis of the Math." Its goal was man-making, based on spirituality, nationalism, scientific outlook, dignity of labour and other high qualities, as adumbrated by Swāmi Vivekānanda. The centre was recognised as a branch of the Rāmakrishna Mission in 1918, from which year it sallied forth into a regulated programme of extensive fruitful activity, appreciated all over the Madras Presidency.

Centres were also being organised in Bengal. Soon after Swāmi Sāradānanda's return from the West, he had undertaken in December, 1899 a tour of East

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Bengal, during which the people of Barisāl in particular had been very much attracted by his talks and personality. And in 1904, when Sharat Chandra Chakravarti, a disciple of Swāmi Vivekānanda, resided in the town, the interest created by the Swāmi crystallised into the formation of a small group for the study of Vedānta. Gradually by 1910 more people co-operated with the group to give its philanthropic and religious works a constitutional shape. According to the wishes of the organisers, the institution was affiliated to the Rāmakrishna Mission on February 2, 1911.

The Dacca centre, after its inception in the days of Swāmi Vivekānanda, carried on its activities in the house of Mohini Mohan Dās at Sabjimahal. They were chiefly religious till March, 1908, when a department of social service, as suggested by Swāmi Vivekānanda, was added. The visit of Swāmi Paramānanda in 1911 led to the opening of a library. In November, 1913, the Sevā work initiated by the Mission as house to house medical aid and nursing got further impetus when, with the help of Nawāb Khwājeh Salimullā Bahādur, an indoor hospital was started within the town. The visit of Swāmi Premānanda in March, 1914 infused fresh enthusiasm. The Belur authorities accepted its responsibility of management from 1914, although formal affiliation had to wait till 1916. From October, 1914, this branch of the Mission was located in three rented houses at Wāri and South Maishandi. In 1915 the centre got a gift of about 1·7 acre of land—three-fifths of it for the Mission and the rest for the Math—on which foundations of the first Math and Mission buildings, consisting of the monks' quarters and an indoor ward, were laid by Swāmis Brahmānanda and Premānanda respectively during their visit in February, 1916. The Mission hospital with twenty beds was opened on August 24, 1916, and other structures were

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successively put up. In the same year, the centre also acquired a second contiguous plot slightly larger than the first.

Another centre directly attributable to the inspiration of Swāmi Vivekānanda came into being shortly after his passing away. It was the Sevāshrama at Vrindāban, a great holy place for Vaishnavas about a hundred miles south of Delhi, where, as in similar places in North India, there was nobody to look after the poor, pious pilgrims from all over the country. In January, 1907, taking their cue from the organised activities of the Benares Home of Service, some local gentlemen formed themselves into a body in order to found a Sevāshrama. A managing committee was formed in 1908, and Jajneswar Chandra and his son took charge of the work in co-operation with Brahmachāri Harendra of the Belur Math, a distant relative of Swāmi Vivekānanda. Some relatives of Balarām Bose of Calcutta, who owned the temple premises at Banshibat, on the Jamunā, known popularly as Kālā Bābu's Kunja, kindly placed its outer portion at the disposal of the organisers to accommodate the patients. The management passed to the Mission on January 12, 1908; and by the end of 1912 the number of indoor beds increased from four to fifteen.

We left the Advaita Āshrama of Māyāvati just established in the heart of dense Himālayan forests. Situated at an altitude of about 6,300 feet, the monastery commands a magnificent view of the snow-ranges—extending from Kedārnāth and Badrinārāyan on the west to Api on the east, nay beyond on both sides. Here, after the death of her husband, Mrs. Sevier continued to stay in a separate house and cater for the wants of the monks. The estate belonged formerly to General McGregor, who used it as a tea plantation. When converted into an Āshrama, the houses were found hardly suitable for

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the new purpose; so extensive remodelling had to be undertaken. Swāmi Swarupānanda conducted the Āshrama as well as *Prabuddha Bhārata* most efficiently. He also made arrangements to bring out *The Complete Works of Swāmi Vivekānanda* from Māyāvati itself. But pneumonia cut short his promising career on June 27, 1906, at Nainitāl, where he had gone in search of a more suitable location for the growing activities at Māyāvati. The Āshrama lost another valuable worker, Swāmi Vimalānanda, who had done much good work at Nainitāl, Allahabad and Bangalore. Swāmi Virajānanda became the second President and continued the unfinished work of Swāmi Swarupānanda by publishing the first five volumes of the *Complete Works*, a comprehensive biography of the great Swāmi in four volumes and various other books. He was also Editor of *Prabuddha Bhārata*. On his retirement after strenuous work Swāmi Prajnānanda stepped in as President and Editor in the middle of December, 1913. The publications of the Āshrama have earned a name for them. For the benefit of the poor people of these mountain regions, a charitable dispensary was started in the Āshrama in 1903. This was accommodated in 1914 in a permanent building, which also had provision for six indoor beds.

This presents in a nutshell the main developments in India during the decade ending with 1912. We have not purposely touched upon the various types of temporary relief work undertaken by the Mission, since they form a regular feature almost every year, and they are too numerous to recount without taxing the readers' patience. By way of apprising them of what we have skipped over, we may mention that in addition to the Famine relief works already referred to, the Mission undertook similar works at Khāndwā in Central Provinces (now Madhya Pradesh) in 1900, in the Sylhet

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district of Assam and Tippera, Noākhāli and 24-Parganās districts of Bengal in 1906-7, and in Murshidābād (Bengal) and Puri (Orissa) districts in 1908 ; Flood relief works in the Bhāgalpur district (Bihār) in 1899, in 24-Parganās in 1900, and in Midnapore and Hooghly districts of Bengal in 1909 ; Plague relief and Sanitary aid in Calcutta in 1899 and 1900, and at Bhāgalpur in 1904, 1905 and 1912 ; Fire relief work at Bhubaneshwar (Puri) in 1910 ; Earthquake relief at Dharmasālā (Punjab) in 1905 ; and Landslide relief at Darjeeling in 1899.

Having followed thus far the history of the Math and Mission in India up to the end of 1912, we now turn to the West to follow the Math activities there through all their ups and downs during the same period. It must be mentioned here that on legal grounds, the Mission of those days did not extend its activities beyond British India, and latterly beyond British possessions outside India, leaving the other fields to the Math, which accordingly had its centres in the Princely States of those days, as also in the U.S.A.

We have seen that Swāmis Abhedānanda and Trigunātita, with their headquarters in New York and San Francisco respectively, were conducting extensive Vedānta work in the United States. Swāmi Abhedānanda, in particular, was meeting with signal success in New York and round about, and the circle of his friends, admirers and students was widening every day, till he became recognised as a noted preacher, philosopher and writer. But as there was no permanent house for his work in New York, he had to live and hold classes in rented flats and houses, and give the public lectures in bigger halls of the city. Thus in 1900 the Vedānta Society was at 13 East 58th Street, where Swāmi Vivekānanda stayed before his final departure from the United States. By 1901 the lectures of Swāmi Abhedānanda

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became so popular that the audience rose to six hundred at times. In addition there were the classes on Rāja-Yoga and other subjects. From 1902 onward, he also began to pay occasional visits to England and the Continent. Besides, he opened classes for children, in which work he was helped for a time by Swāmi Turiyānanda. In addition, the number of his books went on multiplying. The work having thus increased and opportunities for further expansion having opened up, the authorities at Belur sent as his assistant Swāmi Nirmalānanda, who reached New York on November 25, 1903. On January 30, 1905 a Vedānta centre was opened at Brooklyn under the Swāmi, who lived there till he was called back home, where he arrived on January 27, 1906. In May of that year Swāmi Abhedānanda too left for a sojourn in India, Swāmi Bodhānanda having been sent in the meantime to continue the New York work, which he took up from July 1.

Swāmi Abhedānanda's return to India was an occasion for great public rejoicing and enthusiasm for Vedānta. He visited many places, beginning with Colombo, where he landed, being accorded receptions and delivering lectures everywhere, and telling the Hindus of the appeal their philosophy and mode of life made to people in the West. His audiences were convinced that Swāmi Vivekānanda's work, begun with so much promise, was continuing in full vigour through the efforts of the Swāmis who succeeded him. On November 10, 1906, the Swāmi sailed back from Bombay with Swāmi Paramānanda as his assistant. Soon after his return to New York, Swāmi Abhedānanda purchased on March 2, 1907, premises No. 105 West 80th Street for the Vedānta Society, and almost at the same time a farm-house at Berkshire, situated four miles from West Cornwall Station, Connecticut, amidst scenic grandeur, to serve as a retreat for Vedānta students.

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As after Swāmi Paramānanda's arrival in New York, Swāmi Bodhānanda could be spared for work in other fields, the latter went in January, 1907, to Pittsburg, Ohio, to organise Vedānta work there, for which a group of local aspirants had applied in 1906.

Another Vedānta centre came into existence in Boston, where Swāmi Paramānanda went early in 1909 on the invitation of a friend and started classes on Vedānta. In a little while he was able to create interest in neighbouring places also. His visit to Washington, necessitated by the rigours of the Boston winter, was particularly fruitful in starting the Vedānta Society there in December, 1909. The Swāmi divided his year between the two centres, Sister Devamātā, a very able Western disciple, carrying on the work at both the places during his absence. She had visited India and learnt at the feet of Swāmi Rāmakrishnānanda and others. Her devotion to the cause and her exposition of the philosophy were greatly appreciated in both the centres. Swāmi Paramānanda visited Europe in 1912, where he did intensive preaching on Vedānta for nearly six months at Florence and at Guyon (Switzerland), as also in Germany, returning to Boston in November. From Boston he started in the same year a magazine called *The Message of the East*. And he published a number of books.

And now there took place in New York a peculiar development, which compelled Swāmi Abhedānanda to dissociate himself from the Vedānta Society. Though a very successful preacher of Vedānta, ranking only next to Swāmi Vivekānanda in his appeal and volume of work, he now found it impossible to go on with the Executive Committee of the Society. Accordingly he went to live in the Berkshire retreat, which then belonged to him. A group of his old students gathered round him there. With this retreat as his centre, he still carried on extensive preaching work by making

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occasional tours to different towns, as was his wont. In presenting this rather delicate episode of our history, we translate the following from his Bengali life written by his disciple Swāmi Shankarānanda: "On June 12 (1910) he wrote to Swāmi Brahmānanda that he was returning to India, and so another monk should be sent for the New York work. We saw earlier that the New York Vedānta Society had a home of its own, which had been purchased with money raised by a loan that was being gradually repaid. Owing to Swāmi Abhedānanda's stay in England for most of the time, the membership of the Society decreased, and the income fell, till it became impossible to liquidate the loan, and it was decided to sell the house. Meanwhile, the Society sold off the property of the Vedānta Āshrama (at Berkshire) to Swāmi Abhedānanda, since it was not in a position to clear the debt on it. The Swāmi purchased it with the money he had realised from the proceeds of his books. He offered a similar proposal for the Society building itself, which the members of the Society turned down. In order to repay the loan, they let out most of the rooms of the Society building; and therefore on May 5, 1910, Abhedānanda left New York, never more to live in the Society building" (pp. 400-1).

As a consequence of this and for other reasons, some changes were effected, round about this time, in the personnel of the Board of Trustees at Belur. From the information available to them, the Trustees concluded that by accepting permanent domicile in America, Swāmi Abhedānanda had ceased to be a Trustee. The Second General Report of the Mission (p. 66), published in May, 1919, omits his name and notes, "The names of Swāmis Trigunātita, Rāmakrishnānanda, Premānanda and Advaitānanda have been omitted from the original list (of Trustees) on account of their demise, and that of Swāmi Abhedānanda, he having made him-

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self ineligible to be a Trustee according to the rules laid down in the Deed of Trust of the Belur Math, by settling himself permanently out of British India." The same note also records, "The names of Swāmis Achalānanda, Shankarānanda, Mahimānanda, Dhirānanda and Nirbhayānanda have been added to the original list on account of their being elected [on August 24, 1910] to the Trusteeship after the Memorandum [of the Rāmakrishna Mission] was drawn up." It may be mentioned in passing that Swāmis Nirmalānanda, Vijnānānanda, Sachchidānanda I, Shuddhānanda, Bodhānanda and Ātmānanda had been elected Trustees on May 7, 1903; but the first two had declined to accept the responsibility. And Swāmi Virajānanda had been elected a Trustee on September 26, 1906.

To resume the history of the Rāmakrishna movement in America, the upshot of the differences leading to Swāmi Abhedānanda's severance from the New York Vedānta Society was that, under the direction of the Belur Math authorities, the Pittsburg centre was closed from October, 1912, since Swāmi Bodhānanda had to take charge of the New York centre owing to the resignation of Swāmi Abhedānanda (See the First General Report of the Mission, p. 11).

In spite of this temporary set-back in New York, the work in California flourished under the able leadership of Swāmi Trigunātita. Unlike his predecessor, Swāmi Turiyānanda, he made San Francisco his main centre, from which he went out to preach in other Californian towns. The Shānti Āshrama too received his due attention. Every year he took his students to the retreat, and utilised the period of their stay there for training them in the same rigorous way as the previous Swāmi had done. His spiritual ministration in and around San Francisco met with such appreciable success that in 1905 the centre was able to begin the

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construction of a three-storied building, which after completion and dedication on January 7, 1906, came to be known as the Hindu Temple. Luckily, it was untouched by the terrible earthquake of April 18 of that year and the consequent fire, which destroyed a large part of the city. With the help of Swāmi Prakāshānanda, who arrived from India in the first week of August, 1906 to assist him, Swāmi Trigunātita turned his attention to various other activities. A monastery was established on the top floor of the Temple, the number of whose inmates rose to seven. "A sort of nunnery" was also started in a rented house near by, in which he had three inmates. The centre came to possess a press, from which was published a monthly magazine called the *Voice of Freedom*. "'He also established a sort of Brook Farm in Concord, Contra Costa County, which, like Brook Farm itself, was financially unsuccessful. Swāmi Trigunātita was an impressive ascetic. He held services continuously for eighteen hours on Shri Rāmakrishna's Birthday and Christ's Birthday. He conducted a voluminous correspondence, lectured twice a week to the general public, gave courses in Sanskrit, meditation and the Upanishads, saw his numerous students privately on an average of once every two weeks, and thereby reduced his sleeping time to an hour or so a night. He even found time to play with his students' children! During November or July, from 1903 to 1914, he took those students who were able and willing, to Shānti Āshrama to train them intensely in concentration and meditation" (*The Vedanta in California,* by Dr. Dorothy F. Mercer).

Side by side with this work in San Francisco, an attempt was made to organise an independent centre in Los Angeles under the ministership of Swāmi Sachchidānanda II. This, however, did not succeed. So the Swāmi was asked to return to India.

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IN TUNE WITH THE PAST

In our survey of the events of the decade following Swāmi Vivekānanda's exit, we omitted any reference to constitutional changes and ideological reaffirmation, though these are the most important facts in the career of an organisation. It is now high time to turn our attention to these. We noted that Swāmi Vivekānanda had framed certain rules for the guidance of the Math and had drawn up a brief constitution for the Mission as well. Both these institutions grew up by their inner urge, public need, the dialectics of time and divine dispensation. From the very beginning it was apparent that the Mission as constituted could not undertake much field work. The active members of the Mission, viz., the monks, looked upon the Belur Math as the mother institution and upon the senior monks—Swāmis Brahmānanda, Premānanda and Sāradānanda in particular—as their guides. As a consequence, the Mission seemed to be heading for a natural death out of sheer inanition.

The logic of circumstances, however, worked otherwise and ultimately made the Mission the more prominent of the two sister organisations, though the monks with characteristic devotion still held fast to the monastery at Belur as their first place of inspiration and their last refuge. By 1909, it became evident that the Mission must have a constitution of its own. Swāmi Brahmānanda, Swāmi Sāradānanda and some others had foreseen the need for this, and were heartily in favour of it. But an institution that grows by internal evolution necessarily proceeds slowly, so that even a real need has to prove itself before it can claim

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attention. The very fact that Swāmi Vivekānanda established two separate institutions, the Math and the Mission, reveals that he had a premonition of this necessity. But as yet the minds of the other people concerned were not prepared for this bifurcation. However, in due course, definite problems arose. Land and houses had to be held by the institutions for philanthropic work in a legal way, and the honour of the monks as well as common propriety required some constitutional procedure in order to place the Mission members and their handling of public funds above criticism. As the First General Report of the Mission puts it: Since the Rāmakrishna Math of Ālambāzār and Belur had directed and controlled all the work done during the fifteen years from 1897 to 1912, "it is no wonder that the Rāmakrishna Mission could work and thrive without having any formal constitution of its own. But with the growth of its scope and public responsibilities, the need of a formal constitution steadily urged itself on the workers and authorities of the Mission, and from the year 1906, an attempt to draw up a constitution had been leisurely going on. But what precipitated matters were specific instances of difficulty about such endowments to our charitable institutions as could be received and utilised only in a capacity recognised by the law of the land; and it is to obviate such difficulties that it became indispensable to give the Rāmakrishna Mission a legal status. Evidently, under modern conditions of public life, the legal incorporation of such an institution is a necessity. Its formal recognition by the Government as a *bona fide* association for public good also appeared at the time highly desirable." This reference to the Government can be fully appreciated in the light of the national movement, then in its heyday, with which we shall presently deal.

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We have it on the authority of the Bengali biography, *Swāmi Brahmānanda* (pp. 236-37), that some time in 1908 Swāmi Brahmānanda was busy consulting his brother-disciples—among them Swāmis Shivānanda and Akhandānanda—and seeking legal advice in Calcutta in order to give shape to the Mission constitution. At last a general meeting was called at the Belur Math to get public approval of the new step. This being readily obtained, the Mission was registered on May 4, 1909, "with eight of the Trustees of the Belur Math as its promoters, and with a memorandum of association, and a body of rules, regulations and bye-laws" under Act XXI of 1860 of the Governor General of India in Council. The quotation is from the First General Report of the Mission, which says further: "When thus a legal status was given to the Mission, the newly formed Governing Body found no small difficulty in accommodating the old state of things to the new forms of procedure; and that peculiar process is still going on. The old members of the Rāmakrishna Mission, those followers of Shri Rāmakrishna Deva who had already become more or less associated with the Sannyāsins of the Belur Math in all the Mission works undertaken before the registration of the Society, had to be renominated by the Governing Body as members of the Rāmakrishna Mission, before any members under the new rules were admitted. But still some of the old members were unwilling to observe the mere formality of a signature to be given as a legal token of assent to the renomination. The working and constitution of the branch centres, again have to be adjusted to the requirements of the bye-laws, so that their affiliation to the present Mission may be properly established. And lastly, the actual province of the Mission work has to be distinctly marked out, so far as possible, from the

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proprietary jurisdiction and the purely spiritual discipline of the monasteries."

We reproduce this long passage for the readers to enjoy a humorous situation that developed, to the chagrin of the innocent monks working the administrative machinery. One can almost see the monks arguing with and cajoling the old members to be more reasonable, and the latter, still unconvinced, silencing them with the naive remark that it is not organisation that matters, but the Master's spirit. As Sister Niveditā would put it, it was all symptomatic of the "unorganisedness" of the Indian society as a whole. The Government might use its power to bring order out of chaos among recalcitrants, but what could the monks do against their best well-wishers? That was the tragi-comedy of the Indian situation in which the Rāmakrishna Mission had its birth.

And what was this constitution of the Mission? The Memorandum of Association says among other things:

"The objects of the Association are:

(*a*) To impart and promote the study of the Vedānta and its principles as propounded by Shri Rāmakrishna and practically illustrated by his own life, and of comparative theology in its widest form.

(*b*) To impart and promote the study of the arts, sciences and industries.

(*c*) To train teachers in all branches of knowledge above mentioned and enable them to reach the masses.

(*d*) To carry on educational work among the masses.

(*e*) To establish, maintain, carry on, and assist schools, colleges, orphanages, workshops, laboratories, hospitals, dispensaries, houses for the infirm, the invalid and afflicted, famine relief works, and other educational and charitable works and institutions of a like nature.

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(*f*) To print and publish and to sell or distribute, gratuitously or otherwise, journals, periodicals, books or leaflets, that the Association may think desirable for the promotion of its objects.

(*g*) To incorporate any institutions, societies, or associations having objects wholly or in part similar to any of those of the Association, and co-operate with any person or persons in aid of such objects."

It goes without saying that the history of the Mission, pursued so far, shows that many of the "objects" are still to be attained. Besides, the object stated in the first clause is so very natural to monastic life that the Mission practically entrusted this work, and still does so where there is the opportunity, to its sister institution, the Rāmakrishna Math. The same remark applies to the object mentioned in clause (*f*), though in this field the Mission seems to be taking some strides in recent years. From the historical point of view, the object stated in the last clause is of particular interest, since it indicates the way the Mission developed, and continues to develop to some extent even today. In the early days, as already pointed out, there was no distinction between the Math and the Mission, and the terms were used indiscriminately. Nor was there any sustained effort at that stage toward planned development. The seeds that Swāmi Vivekānanda had sown broadcast were sprouting of their own accord wherever the soil was favourable. The promoters may have been monks or lay devotees, or even interested outsiders. The authorities lent their moral support and practical advice to any good undertaking, so far as it was possible for them. Most of the projects started on an experimental and individualistic basis with enthusiasm as their sole asset. Organisation and thought of permanence came later.

From the constitutional and practical point of

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view, the Mission had one great advantage in this. It could allow the institutions to grow freely without the handicaps of legal niceties, and feel their way at every step depending on public sympathy. Unshackled by constitutional requirements, the field workers would put their whole energy into their labour of love, and never grudge any inconvenience, nor be deterred by failures or adversities. They could also follow a sort of hit-or-miss policy—starting a type of work, no matter whether it was Math or Mission work, carrying it on for some time and then switching on to a more suitable one, the ultimate determinant being the strength of the inner urge and the favourableness of the conditions prevailing. There were these and other advantages, which the twin organisations could fully avail. They could guide the private organisers from a distance, without actually being involved in the difficulties of pioneering; and then either of the two organisations, as circumstances favoured, could step in to assume complete responsibility at the proper time. But a great disadvantage was that unless the Math and Mission were given a publicly recognisable shape, valid in law at the same time, some unscrupulous person might use the names of Shri Rāmakrishna and Swāmi Vivekānanda to exploit the goodwill of the Math and Mission. To forestall such difficulties, Swāmiji had appointed the Belur Math Trustees, who gradually asserted themselvees to give definite characters to the Math branches. This was also one of the reasons why the Mission came to be legally constituted in 1909. Besides, the Mission had to avoid wastage of human energy and public money consequent on unplanned growth and unchecked experiment. These latter disadvantages came to be felt more and more as days rolled on, till at the time of writing (1957) the Mission has almost given up the policy of experimenting privately.

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Now, on the contrary, it publicly initiates its own schemes after weighing the pros and cons.

The first Governing Body consisted of twenty monks—Swāmis Brahmānanda, Advaitānanda, Sāradānanda, Premānanda, Shivānanda, Akhandānanda, Trigunātita, Subodhānanda, Abhedānanda, Turiyānanda, Shuddhānanda, Bodhānanda, Ātmānanda, Sachchidānanda I, Virajānanda, Achalānanda, Mahimānanda, Shankarānanda, Dhirānanda and Nirbhayānanda. Of these Swāmi Brahmānanda became the President, Swāmi Advaitānanda Vice-President, Swāmi Premānanda Treasurer, Swāmi Sāradānanda Secretary, and Swāmi Shuddhānanda Accountant.

Although the monks held executive posts, and the rules stipulated that the Trustees of the Belur Math would be ex-officio members of the Governing Body of the Mission, thus avoiding any possible conflict of allegiance on the part of the monastic workers, the Mission was broad-based on democratic principles, in that the membership was thrown open to non-monastic members, who had an equal right to vote at the General Meetings of the Mission.

The Bye-laws appended to the Rules referred to the method of managing branch centres and the manner of their recognition as such. There were to be either Local Committees or single individuals in charge of the branch centres. This alternative arrangement was meant to give some flexibility for ready adaptation to local conditions. There was constitutional provision for the supervision of the activities of the branch centres, as also for the dissolution and reconstitution of the Local Committees, though no term of office was specified. The centres were to be known as Rāmakrishna Mission centres, and the funds were to be named after the Mission.

The Rules and Bye-laws were short, and, as it

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happens everywhere in the initial stages, the framers depended more on the goodwill of all concerned than on constitutional safeguards. Again, in the working of the Mission, the paternal feeling subsisting between the teacher and his disciples, or the brotherly sentiments prevailing among self-sacrificing colleagues wedded to the same high cause, determined mutual relationships so that the provisions of the Rules and Bye-laws were seldom followed with exactitude. This was at once the strength and the weakness of the Mission. This trust and absence of strict formality facilitated smooth working and the putting forth of the greatest individual effort. But there might be black sheep to turn this absence of rigidity to their own advantage. There were also certain lacunae in the Rules for the acquisition and management of immovable property, which evil-minded people could misuse for their own purposes. The Local Committees tended to become fossilised or dependent on the whims of a few powerful donors. The functions of the office-bearers were not well defined, leading to unnecessary friction at times, and at others to concentration of power in certain hands, and lack of opportunity for assistants to be trained up or be placed in positions of general recognition. As we proceed, we shall see that some unscrupulous people did take full advantage of these weak spots, and the Mission had accordingly to make the Rules clearer and more binding in course of time, despite the dislike of the monks as a body for this sort of rigidity.

The Mission, as now legally constituted, clearly drew its line of demarcation, from the Math. Legally speaking, the Math organisation is managed by a Board of Trustees, who are not accountable to anybody so long as they fulfil the provisions of the Trust. They are an autonomous religious body charged with preserving and

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propagating the ideas and ideals preached by Shri Rāmakrishna, the maintenance and furtherance of the properties placed under their care, and the support and sustenance of the Sannyāsin followers of Shri Rāmakrishna residing at the Belur Math. Through historical growth, the Trustees of the Belur Math came to extend their jurisdiction over and manage a chain of Math institutions all over India, which for all practical purposes were regarded as branch Maths, notwithstanding the fact that for a pretty long time, the legal connection between the parent body and the branches remained inchoate and tenuous. All of these had in common a purely religious outlook, with worship, preaching and spiritual self-culture as their main activities. In this they were clearly distinct from the Mission proper.

In course of time, however, the Math centres began to enter into philanthropic service, opening hospitals, dispensaries, schools, relief operations, etc., just like the Mission centres, so that the practical line of demarcation between them tended to be obliterated. Moreover, the same persons as Trustees or members of the Governing Body presided over the two sister organisations, and the same monastic workers were transferable off and on from the Math to the Mission centres and *vice versa*. The position was further complicated by the lingering habit of the early authorities themselves of continuing even after the registration of the Mission, to use that term rather broadly. To substantiate this view, we quote from the First General Report of the Mission, "It may be laid down here that any work of spiritual, educational or charitable utility to the public which any member of the monastic order, being also a member of the Mission, may do without money or with money taken from the public or from the Mission funds for the purpose, falls within the category of Mission work.

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With regard to lay members of the Mission, it may also be laid down that any work of spiritual, educational, or charitable utility to the public which they may do in pursuance of definite instruction from the Mission or any of its recognised centres falls within the category of Mission work" (condensed). Needless to say that in those early days, "definite instruction" might simply mean oral approval. And by using the word "spiritual" the definition is unwittingly extended to cover Math activities as well.

Nevertheless, the Mission is a distinct organisation with separate management, funds, constitution and well-defined fields of activity; and there is no reason why it should be mixed up with the Math in thought or practical dealings. The funds of the Mission are obtained from Government grants, public contributions, sale of properties, fees from students, etc., whereas the Maths get their sustenance mostly from the devotional offerings of the lay followers of Shri Rāmakrishna, though for their humanitarian activities, the Maths too have a greater circle to appeal to and get succour from. They keep clear accounts of these funds and are ever ready to satisfy the public by offering them for inspection.

Casually we mentioned another class of institutions which used the names of Shri Rāmakrishna, Swāmi Vivekānanda or Shri Sāradā Devi, the Holy Mother, but which had no connection with the Math or Mission, unless it were a purely moral or spiritual one. Under the existing conditions, the exact relation of the Math and Mission to this group of institutions had yet to be clearly defined. As we suggested earlier, some of these might have been Math and Mission centres in their primitive stages, or unrecognised experimental adventures that hoped to be blessed with recognition in future. Of the rest, some were so intimately connected

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with monastic members that they could hardly be distinguished from the genuine branch centres. The initial confusion that thus cropped up persists even today, though partially, so that the 1954-1955 General Report of the Mission is constrained to repeat, "The appropriation of the name of Shri Rāmakrishna or Swāmi Vivekānanda by any institution does not necessarily imply that it is controlled by the central organisation at Belur." But of this more in future.

We have so far finished a decade in the life of the Rāmakrishna Math and Mission, during which the twin institutions, following in the footsteps of Swāmi Vivekānanda, concentrated their efforts mostly on consolidating the gains already made, though a few more regions too were added to the existing domain. Or, in other words, the decade following Swāmi Vivekānanda was still dominated by his influence, though his brother-disciples, each in his own way, showed their worth in the fields allotted to them. Specially Swāmi Rāmakrishnānanda's contribution in South India and Swāmi Abhedānanda's success in the West in the earlier days deserved the highest encomium. Unfortunately, Swāmi Rāmakrishnānanda's life was cut short by tuberculosis on August 21, 1911 ; and Swāmi Abhedānanda's career of resounding success in New York and, for the matter of that, in the West, practically lost its tempo after 1910, though he continued in the U.S.A. for another ten years, sailing back home from San Francisco in the middle of 1921. Earlier than this, the twin organisations had sustained two other serious losses, not yet mentioned. Swāmi Niranjanānanda breathed his last prematurely of cholera on May 9, 1904, and Swāmi Advaitānanda, in ripe old age, on December 28, 1909. The early part of this century thus took a heavy toll of the direct disciples of the Master, making the organisation definitely poorer. With these stalwarts of the first generation,

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again, were passing away some of the bright luminaries of the second generation too. Swāmi Swarupānanda's and Swāmi Vimalānanda's deaths have already been referred to. Swāmi Sadānanda, the second disciple of Swāmiji, died of diabetes on February 8, 1911. After that occurred the irreparable loss of Sister Niveditā through dysentery on October 13, 1911.

Through weal and woe the Math and Mission progressed with steady steps, asserting the primacy of spirituality and truth at every turn. To ensure the purity of the movement, it still had at its head some of the best minds trained by Shri Rāmakrishna personally. And to reinforce this and guide the growing organisation in the right course, there were the life and teachings of Swāmi Vivekānanda, still fresh and invigorating. With such asset, the organisation could not only look at the future with confidence, but could also boldly face many a difficulty, as it actually did in subsequent years. The monks were fully aware of the pitfalls around as well as of their strength ; so with care and vigilance, yet with utmost vigour, they pushed on with their work. For the poverty of the nation was stark, and its misery appalling, before which no feeling heart could remain unmoved. Besides, according to the vow the monks had taken and the belief they had imbibed, their salvation lay in realising God by doing good to others in various spheres. This spurred them on to more and more struggle, despite obstacles and disappointments at times.

But while dealing with this social service aimed at spiritual realisation, one must not run away with the idea that service alone was the preoccupation of the Order as a whole. Far from it. The Master had led a unique spiritual life, which at times was completely isolated from the world, and during its efflorescence was bereft of work in the ordinary sense, though out of

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compassion he was then engaged in ceaseless exhortation about the higher values of life. Some of his immediate followers too had underlined by their own lives the need of solitary communion in far away places, cut off from the social life of the people. On the other hand, Swāmi Vivekānanda, under the instructions of his Master, had laid stress on an integrated scheme of life, in which the pursuit of knowledge, devotional absorption, mysic communion and selfless work found due consideration. Accordingly he had laid down the following rules for the guidance of the novices:

"1. The Lord used to prescribe particular courses of spiritual practice for particular individuals. Hence there cannot be any universal rule for such discipline. . . .

"4. The object of this Math is to form characters combining Jnāna, Bhakti, Yoga and Karma; and all the Sādhanas (spiritual disciplines) that are necessary for that end will be accepted as the Sādhanas of this Math.

"5. Therefore everyone should bear this in mind that he who shows deficiency in even a single one of these different branches, has not had his character perfectly cast in the mould of Shri Rāmakrishna.

"6. It should also be borne in mind that he who strives for the good of others does a nobler work than he who tries to work out only his own salvation.

"7. For this training, the Math will first be divided into four departments, viz., Jnāna, Bhakti, Karma and Yoga ; . . .

"9. But the members of all the departments must take some part at least in the work department."

That was what the great Swāmi aimed at and his brother-disciples and followers strove to actualise. But human nature being what it is, and the cultural tradition being too strong to change overnight, it was not found possible in practice to implement this scheme

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fully. The great Swāmi himself once admitted defeat at the hands of Swāmi Adbhutānanda. Early in 1902, the year of Swāmiji's passing away, a rule had been introduced at the Belur Math that at the ringing of a bell long before sunrise, all must leave their beds and after ablution proceed to the shrine for meditation ; any one defaulting would not get his meal for the day from the monastery, but have to beg for it outside. Next morning Swāmi Adbhutānanda was seen leaving the monastery. Swāmiji called him back and asked for the reason. Swāmi Adbhutānanda explained that his mind was not such as to be directed to meditation at the stroke of a bell, and that he disliked such outlandish rules, which Swāmiji wanted to enforce as a result of his perverted Western outlook. Dismayed at this, Swāmi Vivekānanda replied, "You stay on, these rules are not for you." Swāmi Adbhutānanda complied for the time being ; but the natural inclination of his mind dragged him out of the limitations of a monastery to live his own life in untramelled spiritual freedom.

This is only typical of the Indian monastic attitude, which chafes at restrictions and believes in individual rather than collective effort. It would prefer direct relationship with God through prayer and meditation, or worship with the aid of time-honoured images and symbols, rather than through the new-fangled symbol of Nara-Nārāyana, the Man-God. This being so, it can be easily understood that the man-power of the Math and Mission for work was limited in two ways—absolutely so far as the total number of hands was concerned, and relatively from the standpoint of the mental preparedness of the members to undergo hardship for others. The membership of the Order was going up, to be sure, and its willingness to work and share responsibilities was also on the increase. Yet these were hardly commensurate with the social demands.

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Hence some of the monks had to overwork themselves and die prematurely, as was the case with Swāmis Rāmakrishnānanda and Sadānanda. To crown all, the standard of living was too low to make up for the daily wear and tear. Conditions have improved somewhat today with the rise of the national living-standard, but not sufficiently. The monks, however, do not complain. And the purpose of our drawing attention to this fact is to show why the organisation in those days could not give as good an account of itself as it wished, though the work the monks produced despite these handicaps struck their countrymen with wonder all the while. The fact is that the lives of the monks and, for the matter of that, the success of the Math and Mission should be judged against the background of the national life in its totality.

As a result we find that a good many of the monks were permanently or by fits and starts spending their days outside the monasteries in spiritual pursuits at such places as Rishikesh, Kankhal and Uttarkāshi. Some, again, spent their days in the retreats within the Math organisation. The Math authorities, notwithstanding their need for everybody's help, did not object to this. They respected the need of personal freedom in the quest of the Spirit. Besides, these self-chosen lives of privation for the sake of God benefited the organisation indirectly by keeping alive before its members the ancient ideal of asceticism. For it was not service in itself that they had left home for, but the realisation of God through self-abnegating service, which under historical necessity has now become the most effective means for the end in view. Moreover, some monks engaged in exacting duties needed physical and mental rest ; and in the absence of facilities in the Order, where could they go but to those places that had arrangements for alms-giving? This spirit of toleration and helpful-

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ness permeated the brotherhood as a whole, so that even today there is a great amount of personal freedom ranging from doing no work to full occupation with the administration of huge institutions. There is love among the divergent elements in spite of this multiple expression of life. Unity in the midst of variety is the watchword, and patient, gradual effort for improvement instead of drastic change, with belief in the ultimate setting right of things through the grace of the Master, is considered the best procedure. Upon this pattern the organisation is built up.

This conflict between work and no work and its various solutions make up, so to speak, the warp and woof of the Math and Mission fabric. In the old Barnagore days, Kāli was ever poring over his books, while others had to do all the rubbing and scrubbing. This made some monks grumble, at which Swāmi Vivekānanda said in disgust, "Why should you be jealous if one of your brothers reads all the while! Bring me all the vessels you have to scour; I shall do it single-handed." Yet Swāmiji himself introduced the philosophy of practical Vedānta; and Swāmi Brahmānanda, his successor, had to resolve the conflict over again.

Mahārāj (Swāmi Brahmānanda) once said, "No illumination is possible unless work is undertaken first. Even for those who give up work and engage solely in meditation and telling of beads and other forms of spiritual discipline, much time is spent in building a hut to live in and in begging for alms." Somebody argued that work itself was a bondage and brought fresh bondage, to which Mahārāj replied, "Work for the Master and Swāmiji brings no bondage. If work is undertaken with the idea, 'I am doing their work,' not only does it not lead to bondage, but on the contrary it ensures all-round progress—physical, moral, mental and spiritual. Surrender yourselves at their feet, be their

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slaves, take absolute refuge in them." At the same time he reminded the monks of the Order, "Work is not the end of life; the end of life is God-realisation." Someone found it difficult to pursue work and meditation together. Mahārāj said to him, "You should not think that it is beyond your capacity just because you failed once or twice. One should try again and again. The Master used to say, 'How often a calf, in its attempt to stand up, falls down! Still it never gives up, till at last it learns to run.' Don't you see the Western nations? A war [the first World War] has broken out, and they are sacrificing themselves, giving up their wives, children and enjoyment. And you who have devoted your mind and life and everything to a much higher cause—the realisation of God and the good of the world—should you still be fretting because you have to work?" When any monk wanted to spend his life in solitary and austere spiritual practices, Mahārāj would advise him, "One should practise work and meditation together. Of course, it is good to remain occupied with spiritual pursuits alone, but how many can do that! We too roamed for five or six years before we started working. Swāmiji called me and said, 'Well, there is nothing in all that.' And we undertook all kinds of work without incurring any evil." As for the secret of practising work and meditation together, he said, "Before engaging in work you should salute Him. And whenever you find leisure in the course of the work, you should remember Him and meditate on Him. At the end of the work, bow down to Him again." His general advice to all was: "If the mind is directed towards God, it gathers power. You can work more than enough with a quarter of your mind by keeping three-fourths of it concentrated on God." The secret of work is to act without selfish motives, dedicating all the results to God. As Mahārāj said, "It is extremely

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difficult to work and keep the head cool. Detachment and renunciation are absolutely necessary; otherwise you sink down." So his advice was: "Work intensely and call on Him. Repeat His name in the midst of all engagements." He was ever on the alert lest the practical Vedānta and Karma-Yoga inculcated by Swāmi Vivekānanda should degenerate into mere humanitarian work; lest a humanism of the Western type should replace God. So his warning voice rang out, "Unless work is done with dependence on God along with detachment and renunciation, one may at times fall into dangers, nay sink into hell. On the contrary, if a person engages in work with the faith that it is the Master's work and with reliance on him, his mind is purified with the process of time. Meditation becomes intense when the mind is pure." And to emphasise what he taught, he added, "This I say from personal experience. Swāmiji used to tell us, 'Well, even if you think that a life is wasted in the service of the many, then let it be. Countless lives have been wasted in the past; let this one also go in the service of the world! What is there to be afraid of?' " Like a true brother-disciple of Swāmiji, Swāmi Brahmānanda taught the gospel of service based on religion. He had not much sympathy for social service or political work inspired by mere political or economic motives. Said he, "Many declare that they will work for the country and the people. I think this is the outcome of ill-digested English education. Never is it possible to do good to others unless one's character is formed. Those who hold on to Him, who have been graced by Him, can never take a false step. All their works and talks and movements do good to the country." Before the monk was the age-old dilemma of steering between the Scylla of inaction and the Charybdis of misguided action. For as Shri Krishna said, "One must know

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the secret of (true) action, evil action and inaction. Inscrutable is the course of action" (*Gitā*, IV, 17). To indicate the way before the monks, Mahārāj expounded those principles that had already been enunciated in another way by Shri Rāmakrishna and Swāmi Vivekānanda. For was not Swāmi Brahmānanda the beloved "mind born" son of the Master? And did not Swāmi Vivekānanda with true insight transfer the reins of this spiritual organisation to a worthy successor?

Swāmi Brahmānanda, however, was something more than a spiritual prodigy; he was also an able administrator. We have referred to the tour of North India that he undertook soon after his assumption of office. That personal visit, we have pointed out, helped the institutions in various ways. Mahārāj's contribution to the building up of any branch centre may not have been spectacular, as was the case with Swāmis Rāmakrishnānanda, Sāradānanda and others. For one thing, he had to pay attention to the building up of the organisation as a whole; and for another, he believed more in strengthening the spiritual life of the monks. As for the purely secular side, he relied more on encouraging and guiding from a distance those others who were directly concerned with the works. Owing to his experience and position in the organisation, all were expected to consult him on important matters, and they did so cheerfully; for to contact him, on whatever grounds, was a blessing in itself, apart from the secular guidance that he was sure to give. All found that his study of the problems and the solutions he offered were masterly. Besides, a word or a hint from him was enough to effect what required long persuasion in other cases. If a centre was in want of money, an indirect mention of the fact by him to a friend or a devotee was sufficient to remove it. The Benares Home of Service, the Kankhal Sevāshrama, the Benares Advaita Āshrama,

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the Vrindāban Sevāshrama and many other branch centres thus derived great benefit from his patronage. He also sometimes went into details when that was felt necessary. For instance, he got the plans for the buildings of many centres prepared under his direction. In all these matters, his aesthetic sense and foresight stood him in good stead. He wanted the plans to be satisfactory from the point of view of utility, economy, future developments, aesthetic setting and proportion. Along with the buildings, there had to be provision, as far as possible, for trees, both decorative and fruit-bearing, as also flower plants and turfs. Open space had to be left between buildings for ensuring health and beauty. The management of a centre, though based on love and spirituality, had to be constitutionally proper. The heads had to look after the physical, moral and spiritual welfare of the young men under their care, and not merely get work done through them. Thus, when in Madras, he was shocked to learn that a Brahmachārin had not been taught how to perform worship or read the *Durgā Saptashati* (*Chandi*) properly. The head was taken to task for this neglect of duty.

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WEATHERING A POLITICAL STORM

(1902—1917)

The last chapter must have convinced the reader that the Math and Mission had a very sound spiritual leader to guide them forward confidently in their self-chosen virtuous path. With him at the helm, they could also weather the worst storm ; and a very bad one—we mean the agitation, known as the Swadeshi Movement, following on the partition of Bengal in 1905—did soon burst upon the twin institutions. It had been brewing, in fact, from the beginning of the century. For a self-respecting nation, proud of its hoary civilisation, cannot put up with foreign domination for all time. But though discontent was there, the nation had no means of self-expression and self-assertion. And as it happens in a subject nation, where healthy channels of political activity are blocked, where public grievance has no constitutional means of redress, and where the rulers stand by wrong decisions because of a false notion of prestige, the national movement perforce goes underground. It then demands the support of all for the secret national army. Where free discussions are possible, one can argue for or against a course openly. But in a movement of secret communication and secret planning, many are caught unawares, because the facts are only partially presented to them. Moreover, when any one has a personal predilection for political struggle, while outwardly belonging to a religious establishment wedded to social service, the temptation becomes irresistible. This seems to have happened, most unfortunately, in the case of Sister Niveditā.

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She had identified herself heart and soul with India. The British rule militated against her sense of justice. An Irish woman by birth, she had smarted under the oppression, and had taken some part in the Home Rule movement for her native land. She was instinctively predisposed to try those methods in India to oust the British. But we cannot dogmatically assert that she actually participated in revolutionary politics; for, according to us, ideological sympathy, covert or overt, is one thing, and field work entirely another. We know that some modern writers say she was actually involved in revolutionary politics, and even that she was a clandestine leader. We discreetly keep silent on such controversial points. All we know is that just after Swāmiji's passing away, she travelled some parts of Western and Southern India, where she vehemently denounced the political serfdom of India. We agree that this was a heroic stand deserving the highest praise from the national point of view. We also know that Niveditā was a versatile genius, an impressive writer, a persuasive speaker and a charming conversationalist. And we suggest that although she was primarily of a religious temperament, she liked self-expression; her dynamic self-sacrifice could not remain confined within the limits of a girls' school, or, for the matter of that, of the Rāmakrishna Math and Mission. She had her friends and admirers among artists, scientists, historians, literary men, politicians, patriots—in fact, among the cultured people who were in the vanguard of India's progress in those days. Many of them were helped and inspired by her in their respective fields. That was a laudable gain for India; and Niveditā's name will be written indelibly in any worthy history of India's national movement. But the question was, could the Mission dabble in politics, or the Math harbour one who talked so loudly about live political issues at the

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same time that she wore the nun's garb? Against her there was the emphatic direction of Swāmi Vivekānanda that the organisation was to steer clear of politics and violent social reform.

The task before the leaders of the Rāmakrishna movement was clear, though painful; for was she not the Sister loved dearly by the brother-disciples of Swāmi Vivekānanda, and did not the organisation expect much of this gifted spiritual daughter of Swāmiji? Swāmi Brahmānanda called the Sister to him and asked her to give up politics. She could not. So the only alternative for her was to dissociate herself from the Math and Mission. This she did by a letter dated July 18, 1902. This unhappy incident has been made much of by some politically-minded Bengali writers of the present day. It is dramatically interpreted as the ejection of the Sister from the narrow field of the Mission and her election by India to a wider national sphere. Neither fact is wholly true. On the one hand, the Mission did not eject her in the strict sense of the term; it was only a formal dissociation, which did not imply the severance of all personal ties. These remained intact. Swāmi Sāradānanda helped her school financially and otherwise. To the senior monks of the Order and to the Holy Mother she still continued to be a loving daughter dedicated to Shri Rāmakrishna and Vivekānanda, and she declared herself as such for the rest of her life. After the death of Swāmi Swarupānanda in 1906, it was she who wrote most of the Occasional Notes, month by month, for *Prabuddha Bhārata,* the only English organ directly conducted by the Order at the time, till her own death in 1911. During this period she had lived as a guest of Mrs. Sevier at the Advaita Āshrama, Māyāvati, more than once. On her death, *Prabuddha Bhārata* published its November issue as "Sister Niveditā Memorial Number." After that

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the Mission did everything in its power to perpetuate her memory. As a proof of this we quote the following from the *Golden Jubilee Souvenir* of her school, "The school is not known to have had any definite name in the beginning. The people of the locality referred to it as 'The School of Niveditā.' The Sister herself in her Project called it 'The Rāmakrishna School for Girls.' Some Westerners referred to it as 'The Vivekānanda School.' After the passing away of Sister Niveditā and after its affiliation to the Rāmakrishna Mission in 1918, it was given its present name, 'The Rāmakrishna Mission Sister Niveditā Girls' School.'" Furthermore, the *Udbodhan* Office, Calcutta, took up the publication and sale of some of Sister Niveditā's books for the benefit of the School, the other books having been handed over by the Sister to Messrs. Longmans, Green & Co. for the same purpose. In recent years, when the company had ceased for a long while to publish the books on the ground that they were not profitable, the Māyāvati Advaita Āshrama took them up on behalf of the Niveditā School. Again, in connection with the Golden Jubilee celebration of the School in 1952, meetings in honour of Niveditā were arranged in London as well as in India, and an endowment of Rs. 5,000/- was created and handed over to the Calcutta University in commemoration of Sister Niveditā. Lastly, the *Udbodhan* Office has all along been circulating a short life and pictures of Niveditā, to which latter the Math and Mission everywhere have been assigning an honoured place.

As for her wider acceptance by the country, history has yet to prove the claim. We quote the following from the First General Report of the Mission (1913): "[After the demise of Sister Niveditā] the financial situation [of her school] became highly precarious, for the income from the sale of books and writings which

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the Sister Niveditā [had] left by will to the school, was not sufficient to meet its requirements. The memorial meeting that was held in March, 1912, at the Calcutta Town Hall in honour of Sister Niveditā, resolved to raise funds to maintain the school, but nothing very substantial has yet accrued to this memorial fund. . . . To commemorate the hallowed memory of Sister Niveditā, Rs. 2,522-7-9 in all was collected by the memorial Committee of Calcutta. . . . The balance of Rs. 2,384-7-9 was handed over to the President, Rāmakrishna Mission, as a trust for the benefit of the school." But we should not be understood to mean that the country did not recognise its indebtedness to the Sister. All that we suggest is that superlative expressions are best avoided in such a context. And we also hasten to add that Sir J. C. Bose and others did much in a personal way to express their love and gratitude for the Sister, and the short lane in which her school stands is named after her.

And now to return to the Swadeshi Movement, the reaction to the partition of Bengal in 1905. To curb the growing national spirit of the Bengalees, who in those days ruled Indian politics, and to break their racial and linguistic solidarity, the British diplomats divided Bengal in two parts, entitled East and West Bengal. As a protest against this foul play, Bengal was in a ferment. It resolved to boycott British goods and patronise indigenous ones. And along with this economic warfare, political feelings began to mount higher and higher, and other provinces began to join hands with Bengal. At this juncture both the Government and the politicians expected the Mission to side with them, in accordance with the well-recognised tenet of belligerents, "Those who are not with us are against us." The Mission was on the horns of a dilemma —misunderstood by some and misrepresented by others

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—with no thanks and plenty of suspicion from either party. We deliberately use the word "some," but perhaps "a few" will express it better. For truth to say, the people as a whole even then loved, helped and trusted the organisation. The Government also had nothing to fear from it and no real cause for anxiety on its score. Yet the "few" both inside and outside the Government were the most vociferous and active ones, and that made a world of difference. The situation developed in such a way that the organisation had to take serious note of it. Accordingly, we find that about a third of the descriptive portion of the Second General Report of the Rāmakrishna Mission is devoted to exonerating the Mission, particularly in the eyes of the Government. The pages start with these very significant lines: "Neither the Master, whose hallowed name the Mission has the proud privilege to bear, nor its organiser, the Swāmi Vivekānanda, had any political end to serve by [his] work. The former had no leisure to bring his mind down to those lower planes of consciousness from which it was possible to think of the temporal things of the world, so absorbed was he in the Deity and with things spiritual and eternal. And the latter, whose love for the Master had brought his life to such perfect conformity with His that he lived only to serve Him by spreading His ideas, had repeatedly declared in unmistakable terms through his speeches and writings that his missionary work in India and abroad was for rousing the dormant spiritual nature of individuals, and therefore of nations, in this age of gross materialism, [so as] to make them men in the real sense of the word. Extracts might be quoted from all his letters, speeches and writings, which will bear testimony to what we have told above, and help the reader to understand clearly that the ideals for which he worked were nothing but religious, and the

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methods which he adopted for the same in India and abroad were nothing but spiritual, e.g., self-control and devotion to God, renunciation and serving of men as images of God."

Nevertheless, Swāmi Vivekānanda's fiery words had roused the drooping spirit of the nation to action; and he has rightly been honoured as one of the greatest nation-builders in India. Indeed he was so, not politically, but in a much deeper and more real sense; for by instilling manliness, vigour of thought, self-esteem and self-help, into the individual and the nation—in brief, making the youths dynamic in their approach to life—Swāmi Vivekānanda, in the closing years of the nineteenth century, became the moulder of those who would be at the helm of affairs in the twentieth. Lest these statements be rejected as mere platitudes, we refer to the tributes of well-known men:

Netāji Subhās Chandra Bose, considered one of the liberators of India, wrote on May 6, 1932 from the Seoni Sub-Jail, in M.P., where he was imprisoned, to A. R. Bhatt, a member in the staff of the *Mahrāttā*: "I cannot write about Vivekānanda without going into raptures. . . . A Yogi of the highest spiritual level in direct communion with the truth, who had for the time being consecrated his whole life to the moral and spiritual uplift of his nation and of humanity, that is how I would describe him. If he had been alive, I would have been at his feet. Modern Bengal is his creation—if I err not."

And Rabindra Nāth Tagore wrote: "In the modern age, it is Vivekānanda who preached a great message in India; it is not bound up with any ceremony. To all his countrymen he declared, 'The power of Brahman lies in every one of you; the Deity in the poor wants your service.' This call has fully roused the hearts of the youth, and so the message has found its fulfilment

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in the service of the country in various ways and through wonderful self-sacrifice. His message imparted energy to man the moment it gave him dignity. The path of that energy is not confined to any predetermined channel; it does not exhaust itself in a mechanical repetition of any particular physical process. It has invigorated man's life and mind in diverse ways. The adventurous enterprises that are in evidence among the young men of Bengal, have at their root that message of Vivekānanda which addressed itself to the soul of man, and not to his finger." (Translated from the *Pravāsi,* Vol. 28, Part I, p. 286.)

Speaking before a meeting at the Rāmakrishna Mission, New Delhi, on March 20, 1949, Jawāharlāl Nehru, Prime Minister of India, said, "I can tell you that many of my generation were very powerfully influenced by him. . . . And so he influenced powerfully the minds of many in India, and two or three generations of young men and women have no doubt been influenced by him. . . . He was no politician in the ordinary sense of the word, and yet he was, I think, one of the great founders—if you like, you may use any other word—of the national modern movement of India, and a greater number of people who took more or less an active part in that movement at a later date drew their inspiration from Swāmi Vivekānanda." And in *The Discovery of India* (p. 400) he wrote, "He came as a tonic to the depressed and demoralised Hindu mind and gave it self-reliance and some roots in the past."

From such views, expressed by some of the greatest thinkers and leaders of India, it may rightly be concluded that Vivekānanda was the idol of the youth of the age. They got their mental batteries charged from his dynamo, but the power thus transmitted was used by them in their particular fields of action, and in their

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own way. And having made practical use of that stimulus and seen its concrete results, they persuaded themselves in their naïveté that Vivekānanda himself stood for such methods and such applications. It was something like a soldier fighting with the *Gitā* in one hand and the sword in the other, and believing that Shri Krishna, the deliverer of the *Gitā,* had preached no other way of life than that of armed combat. Their political struggle was not wrong in itself ; for Hinduism stands for making the whole life an effort at spiritual realisation. But the unthinking Government officials and the over-zealous patriots could, between themselves, make the situation disastrous for the Mission. And that is what actually happened. The Government did not relish the idea of the people having any independent institution or activity of their own, however innocent it might be ; for they knew that independence, once introduced into one sphere of national life, tended to enter into other regions as well. They feared that the spirit of freedom would soon spell the end of British rule in India. And the patriots knew that their only hope lay in harnessing the whole enlightened section of society to the cause of the fight for liberation. From neither point of view could Vivekānanda and his movement be left alone.

Both were right ; and for this peculiar situation the foreign subjugation was to blame. Jesus Christ came to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, yet his Jewish followers acclaimed him as their political saviour, for which mistake Jesus paid with his blood. The nation responded to Swāmiji's clarion call to shake off its torpor and bring about a spiritual resuscitation. But when awakened, it found itself in foreign fetters, to break which it made liberal use of the galvanising energy released by Swāmiji and hailed him as the patriot-saint of India. To a subject nation, politics

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and religion became mixed up inextricably. So in the dawn of national freedom, Swāmiji's message was interpreted from a national point of view.

The problem for the Mission was pressing. The police were in their trail from the beginning of the twentieth century or even earlier. The Second General Report of the Mission records that "until the year 1908 it was all fair weather and smooth sailing for the Mission," though the sleuths of the alien Government "were alert at first to find out the existence of any secret motive of the Mission and its organiser, by watching its workers in silence and opening the foreign letters that reached the Belur Math—and even these were almost convinced, at the time, of the integrity and the open sincerity of them [Math and Mission] both."

When the year 1906 brought the vows of supporting indigenous goods—Swadeshi as it was termed—coupled with a greater production of them and boycott of foreign goods, the monks readily accepted the constructive economic programme; but so far as fighting the foreign rulers was concerned, the Mission authorities "declined all overtures and invitations to join any movement whatsoever which savoured of politics, and this created a bad name for the Mission [among] persons who were staunch believers in politics and agitation. They went out scoffing and spreading the idea that the Mission existed for doing good to America and England, and not to India!" Things did not end there. Some outsiders, wearing the ochre robe of the monks, abused the hospitality of the Mission in some centres in U.P. Coming to know this from newspaper reports of police interrogation of political prisoners, the Belur Math authorities had to make a rule that strangers would not be allowed to stay overnight in any of their centres.

Having no connection whatsoever with politics,

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the monks knew that they had nothing to fear from the public or the police so long as they stuck to their ideal. There might be temporary set-backs due to misunderstandings from either quarter; but ultimately truth was bound to triumph. With faith in the ultimate goodness of everything, they proceeded boldly without caring for frown or favour, and speaking under all circumstances only of spiritual verities. One day it so happened that some revolutionaries, without revealing their identity, sought an interview with Swāmi Brahmānanda, the President of the Order, to discuss the relative merits of the positions taken by them and the Mission. It was something like a challenge, though the interviewers did not mean it to be so. It was also an opportunity for the President to dissuade the young men from what he considered a less effective path at the same time that he vindicated the Mission's outlook. He talked freely with them behind closed doors and told them that they would be serving the country best by following the method laid down by Swāmi Vivekānanda. The discussion had no appreciable effect on the interviewers, but the Mission gained from it indirectly. Despite the fact that this had been intended as a strictly confidential talk, there was one among them who was forced to divulge everything verbatim to the police. The result was that the Government had a peep into the inmost recesses, as it were, of the Mission's mind. This influenced them very much in their ultimate formulation of policy towards the Mission. But for the time being the police entertained suspicion; and it seemed for a while that nothing could modify their attitude. The funny thing was that the patriots too harboured a grudge against the monks. For in the opinion of both parties, Vivekānanda stood for political freedom.

The Mission, under the guidance of Swāmis Brahmā-

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nanda and Sāradānanda, was trying by all means not to get embroiled in this political tangle. But certain factors over which they had no control were conspiring against them. In addition to the confessions of political suspects referred to above, the police were intrigued to find almost all of them in possession of the *Gitā,* the *Chandi* and the books of Swāmi Vivekānanda. This put them on a wrong scent ; they became suspicious of the Mission itself and began to try to read motives that the Mission never had, and to ferret out from the Mission's archives plans of thwarting the Government which the Mission never possessed. Though baffled at every turn in this wild-goose chase, the police would not give up the hunt. On the other hand, not deterred by anything, the Mission workers moved freely among the incognito detectives and revolutionaries, pursuing peacefully the one aim of their life, the service of God in man.

But when poised between the devil and the deep sea, nobody perhaps can escape scatheless. And soon, in 1914, it came to the knowledge of the monks that as the national movement passed from mere agitation to the committing of revolutionary murders and even robberies with, or under the guise of, political motives, the name of the Rāmakrishna movement was being exploited by some misguided people to secure young recruits nominally for spiritual service, but actually for ulterior purposes. Consequently, the Mission had to publish forthwith a warning, which ran partly thus: "The disclosures that have come to light in some of the recent trials of East Bengal, have convinced the Governing Body of the Rāmakrishna Mission that the good name of the Mission and that of the Belur Math have been and are still being used by certain societies to secure recruits to, and spread the doctrines of, their mischievous and not unoften their criminal

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propaganda." In this long statement the Math and Mission completely dissociated themselves from all shades of active politics, reiterated their religious background and motive of social service, disowned all the so-called Rāmakrishna Societies that were not legally affiliated to the true Rāmakrishna Math and Mission, and appealed to the public to be careful not to mix up the purely philanthropic organisations and the political and revolutionary ones.

By such appeal, avowal and admonition the Mission authorities believed that they had given the quietus to all unfounded misapprehension. But they were rudely shocked to read the following lines in the Bengal District Administration Committee Report of 1915: "The subsequently notorious Bārindra Kumār Ghosh, who, together with his brother Arabinda, had fallen much under Mahārāshtra influence, stated in 1908 that, starting his propaganda between 1900 and 1903, he visited every district and sub-division of Bengal, preaching the cause of independence; but failing to awaken response, he returned to Barodā, deciding to appeal next time to religion as well as patriotism. With the partition came his desired opportunity. He and his coadjutors proclaimed the doctrine of Indian independence, and were assisted by the influence of the famous Vivekānanda, who before his death in 1905 [sic] had with his Guru, Rāmakrishna, originated a great revival of Hinduism. Numerous hostels and students' messes afford evidence to confirm the assertion of reliable witnesses, that Vivekānanda's books are extremely popular with the youth of Bengal. Their attraction lies in the fact, as the Principal of a College had told us, 'that his preaching gave rise to a nationalism with a religious tendency.' At the same time the Vivekānanda Rāmakrishna Mission has a purely philanthropic side, which often impels youthful enthusiasm to social service.

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Other circumstances combined to spread a spirit of revolt among the English-knowing classes of Bengal, who are mainly Hindus."

Thus, though the monks of Belur tried their level best to extricate their philanthropic and spiritual activities from the meshes of politics, the Government and the revolutionaries went on ever spreading their nets around them. What could the helpless monks do under such circumstances? It might have pleased the Government to see the Mission stand whole-heartedly against the move for political liberation. But the followers of Swāmi Vivekānanda could not disown their own countrymen struggling for a noble aim, just for the sake of a questionable momentary respite or even monetary help and prosperity. They rather protested against unwarranted Governmental insinuations, appealed to their countrymen to spare them from such thoughtless embroilment, and prayed to the Kindly Light to lead them. The mild protest of the Mission in its magazine, *Prabuddha Bhārata,* and the public criticism by newspaper editors against the above report, seemed to have created a better atmosphere ; and then the favourable remarks of Lord Carmichael, Governor of Bengal, at Dacca in August, 1916, and later in Calcutta, assured the Mission authorities that they would now be left unmolested. But the suspicion still lurked in Government circles, as a result of which the hopes of the Mission were dashed to pieces by the following sentences in the Durbar speech of the Governor in Calcutta on December 11, 1916:

"In attaining their end, they [the recruiters of the criminal movement] use terrorism as well as persuasion, and I feel certain, I am sorry to say, that they often seize the opportunity which membership in a charitable society like the Rāmakrishna Mission or participation in the relief of distress gives them to meet

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and to influence boys who have noble ideas, but who have not enough experience to judge where a particular course must lead. I have the highest respect for the Rāmakrishna Mission and for societies like it. I know nothing more worthy of encouragement than the social service which these societies exist to promote, and there is nothing in India which I deplore more deeply or of which it has been harder to convince me than the fact that mean and cruel men do join these societies in order to corrupt the minds of young men who would, if only they were not interfered with, be benefactors to their fellow countrymen. Such societies naturally attract public sympathy. People think that all who take part in their work must be good men. Parents are glad to see their sons joining them, little thinking that in doing so they run the risk of becoming enemies to their country. You can do no greater service to your country than by trying to prevent these societies being used by those who are doing such infinite harm not only to Bengal but to all India."

This was not an open tirade against the Mission. But while paying a left-handed compliment, this speech by the autocratic head of the province contained innuendoes that were calculated to cut the ground from under the feet of the Mission. The broad conclusion to be drawn from it was that the Mission was good, but many of the men were bad. Delivered at a time when hundreds were rotting and being tortured in gaols, and thousands of families were being ruined by the repressive measures of the foreign Government, such a pronouncement was enough to jeopardise the Mission by alienating all its friends, who out of fear, could neither render personal service nor send monetary help. The Mission realised the position well, and that quickly; for public reaction in the form of keeping aloof from the Mission soon became apparent.

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Therefore the Governing Body of the Mission submitted a memorial to the Governor of Bengal on January 22, 1917, "and passed anxious days for the sacred cause of the Mission" awaiting the result. The memorial stated among other things, ". . . the reference has come to receive interpretations, in some quarters at least, which are . . . already having for the Mission seriously unfortunate consequences—not simply in the withdrawal of support, which was formerly cordially given, but in the diffusion of a distrust and even positive misunderstanding of the whole organisation's character and purpose, which cannot but have disastrous results for the work of the Mission and consequently for the people it serves, the poor of its charities, and the sick of its hospitals." The Mission then had 78 monastic, 121 lay and 2 associate members. The Governing Body instituted an inquiry, which as stated in the Second General Report of the Mission, disclosed not a single instance of any complicity "with crime or with conspiracy, with revolutionary purpose, or even with unconstitutional agitation." It was pointed out that, as a result of the Durbar speech, the active help received by the centres at Benares, Kankhal, Vrindāban and Allahabad—all outside Bengal —was "in danger of being withdrawn," and that some of the members were "hesitating to continue their membership for fear of unnecessary and groundless harassment and trouble." All this was in the form of a humble submission. But one clause of it in particular might not seem quite innocuous to His Excellency. And it ran thus: "Your Excellency's memorialists do not hesitate to explain that like many other monastic orders, including many of the Christian faith, and these not the least actuated by the tradition and spirit of their Master, they should hesitate to refuse from their novitiate, though that is to their belief at

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present blameless, a man whose past life in the world may have been blameworthy ; but like these orders, the acceptance of such novices would be for the purpose . . . of weaning such men from their former courses, and leading them from the points of view these express, to that new and inward life of religion which is the ideal of the Mission, and to that active discipline of social service which is its daily and its exclusive practical aim." Before we come to an explanation of this saving clause, let us first finish with the immediate Governmental entanglement under consideration.

That His Excellency's pronouncement was not as friendly as under diplomatic language it purported to be, is proved by the fact that the reply took months, involving among other things a personal examination of Swāmi Sāradānanda, the Secretary of the Mission, who was summoned to the Government House to see His Excellency to answer and explain certain questions regarding the activities and functions of the Mission. The Secretary was actually met by Mr. W. R. Gourlay, Private Secretary of the Governor. At last on March 26, 1917, the long awaited reply came from His Excellency, which exonerated the Mission and its members saying ". . . my object was not to condemn the Rāmakrishna Mission and its members. I know the character of the Mission's work is entirely non-political, and I have heard nothing but good of its work of social service for the people." And it concluded thus, "I have full sympathy with the real aims of the Rāmakrishna Mission, and it was this abuse of the name of the Mission that I wish to prevent. I hope the words I used will help the Mission to guard against the illegitimate use of its name by unscrupulous people" (Second General Report of the Mission).

The Mission survived the storm without yielding in any vital point. Its principles and method of work

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remained intact, and its independence unimpaired. In this connection we may say that one important principle that saved the character and ideology of the Mission and endeared it to the people of the land was that during the British rule the Mission avoided, to the best of its ability, accepting any recurring grant from the Government, which would have compromised its freedom and brought it under Government control. In the early days such help was entirely eschewed. In the closing days of British rule, when nationalism had some influence on the Governmental machinery, some recurring grants were accepted, but rather as an exception. But there was no such scruple as regards non-recurring grants, when given without any strings attached to them. In the main, however, the Math and Mission depended on private contributions. They preferred to struggle on and let the work grow broad-based upon the people's will. Consequently, the growth of the organisation has been very slow, and the life of the workers anything but comfortable. This was with regard to the permanent institutions. But so far as relieving distress was concerned, the Mission co-operated to a greater degree with the Government, whose help too in this sector was more active. In fact, this was a region in which the Mission could hardly function at times without such help. The Second General Report of the Mission prints five letters in proof of its co-operation with the Government in times of such general calamity.

In the memorial we noted one point, viz., the reservation made by the Mission in the matter of admitting novices who might have been in the black book of the police at some earlier period of their life. The police knew that the Mission—strictly speaking, the Math—did admit some young men who were political suspects. For instance, when Debabrata Bose and

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Sachin Sen, both accused, but afterwards acquitted as not guilty, in what was known as the Mānicktalā Bomb Case, in which many more were also arrested for plotting to overthrow the Government by force, sought admission to the Belur Math in 1909, Swāmi Sāradānanda, Secretary, known for his intrepidity and large-heartedness, acquiesced and stood guarantee for their good behaviour. They got spiritual initiation from the Holy Mother and soon became honoured members of the Order as Swāmis Prajnānanda and Chinmayānanda. They never betrayed the trust placed in them by Swāmi Sāradānanda, though their presence invited constant police vigilance for the organisation. They lived and died—alas, prematurely—as valuable workers of the Math. Swāmi Prajnānanda, especially, raised the intellectual level of the organisation by his contribution to its Bengali magazine, *Udbodhan* as Editor for one year in 1912-13, and then as President of the Advaita Āshrama, Māyāvati, and Editor of *Prabuddha Bhārata* for four years, till his death on April 20, 1918. Swāmi Chinmayānanda followed him on July 19.

Nothing daunted by the attention of the detectives of the Government, Swāmi Sāradānanda again gave shelter in 1912-13 to a few young men who were connected with the revolutionary movement and hence were hounded by the police. One of them, Priyanāth, known afterwards as Swāmi Ātmaprakāshānanda, wrote in the *Udbodhan*, in its Holy Mother Centenary issue, "I joined the Udbodhan (centre) directly after leaving home in May or June, 1912. . . . As we were connected with the revolutionary movement of those days, we were very much watched by the police. . . . The police came to know that I was at the Udbodhan. As a result, Swāmi Sāradānanda got a call in a few days from a high police officer to see him at his office. The Swāmi saw him with me, as a consequence of which I

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had to live outside the Udbodhan for a year and a half. Swāmi Sāradānanda's love was incomparable. But for his compassion, people like me, who had been connected with revolutionary activities, would not possibly have got shelter at the Master's feet." Swāmi Ātmaprakāshānanda, like Swāmi Prajnānanda, fulfilled Swāmi Sāradānanda's expectation and repaid his well-placed confidence by lifelong selfless service in the cause of the Math and Mission. He held many responsible posts, becoming Manager of the Belur Math, Assistant Secretary of the Home of Service, Benares, Secretary of the Mātri-Bhavan, Calcutta, and Treasurer of the Rāmakrishna Math and Mission. He was also the organiser of various relief operations. His death in December, 1954 was mourned by all, who still remember him as a loving spiritual soul with an unruffled temper.

Like Priyanāth, Satish (Satyānanda) also shifted his allegiance from revolutionary politics to religion and joined the Rāmakrishna Order about this time, and he too was under police surveillance for some time even after discarding politics. Later on Satyānanda became the monastic head of the Home of Service, Benares. Nagen (Sahajānanda) also belonged to the same group, and he too identified himself completely with the Rāmakrishna movement to become in time the head of the Sevāshrama at Vrindāban. Still others came at this time who had some sort of association with revolutionary parties, but had never actually participated in any action. Yet they had their share of police suspicion, though not to any appreciable extent.

This "harbouring of revolutionaries," as the Government of the day would put it, was not certainly relished by the bureaucracy. As such, they could just tolerate the Mission, or at best be indifferent to its work ; but abiding active sympathy they never had for

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it, though they always gave it temporary patronage during natural calamities; for in those days there were few voluntary organisations that would co-operate with the Government without seeking some political benefit out of such social contact with the masses. The Government would fain avoid all voluntary service; but the difficulty was that their officers could not reach the inaccessible parts of the country; nor were they available in sufficient numbers to cope with a sudden catastrophe. And in either case they could not win the love and confidence of the people. Thus an organisation like the Rāmakrishna Mission was needed to fill up a real vacuum.

From the side of the Government officials, again, there could be nothing more than lukewarmness towards the Mission, whose members had every sympathy for the national struggle. Though scrupulously avoiding active politics, they were outspoken in their condemnation of repression; and in their eagerness to help the families of political sufferers, they were second to none. As for the opinions held and expressed by them, two illustrations will suffice. One day Swāmis Premānanda and Shivānanda sat on a bench on the verandah of Belur Math facing the Ganges, when reports came to the effect that the police had committed excesses against the womanhood of the country. Swāmi Premānanda at once flared up and, standing in a heroic pose, said, "Brother (meaning Swāmi Shivānanda), the next time we come, it must be with conch and discus (two of the insignia of the Lord Vishnu) to extirpate the evil-doers." And when about 1917-18, the news of cruelty by the police towards a village gentlewoman and expectant mother named Sindhubālā was brought to the notice of the Holy Mother at Jayrāmbāti, she cried out in shocked horror, "Is this an order of the Government or the overzealous act of a police official? If it is an order

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of the Government, then its days are numbered." Such strong views did not remain hidden from the most efficient Intelligence Department of the British raj. And when in addition, the Holy Mother, with full knowledge, initiated the political suspects, it was but natural that even her village home would be regularly watched by the police. As for the Math and Mission as a whole, we have already presented a pretty elaborate picture.

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BALANCED EVOLUTION

(1913—1922)

The Rāmakrishna Math and Mission expanded and grew in strength notwithstanding, or perhaps with the help of, reverses ; for at each challenge from external hurdles, the organisation had to reassert its fundamental tenets in a fresh context and thus gain in clarity of thought and boldness of action. There were temporary set-backs to be sure ; but the old saying, "Failures are the pillars of success," proved true here as elsewhere, because of the sincerity of purpose, the firmness of faith and the deathlessness of the original impulse.

The First General Report of the Mission, covering the period up to 1912, listed the following Math centres in India under the Trustees of the Belur Math:

1. The Rāmakrishna Maṭh, Belur, Dt. Howrah
2. The Rāmakrishna Math, 1 Mukherji Lane, Calcutta
3. The Rāmakrishna Advaita Āshrama, Laksā, Benares
4. The Advaita Āshrama, Māyāvati, P.O. Lohāghāt, Dt. Almorā
5. The Rāmakrishna Math, Muthiganj, Allahabad
6. The Rāmakrishna Home, Mylapore, Madras
7. The Rāmakrishna Āshrama, Bull Temple Road, Bangalore City

The Mission centres mentioned were:

1. The Rāmakrishna Mission Home of Service, Benares

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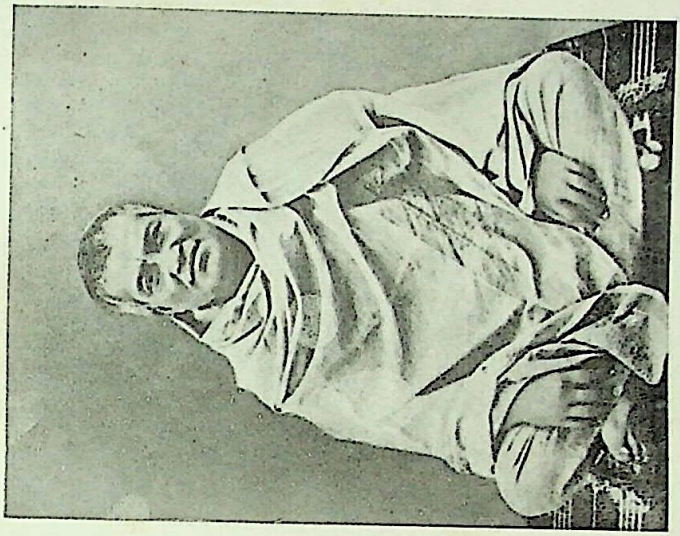
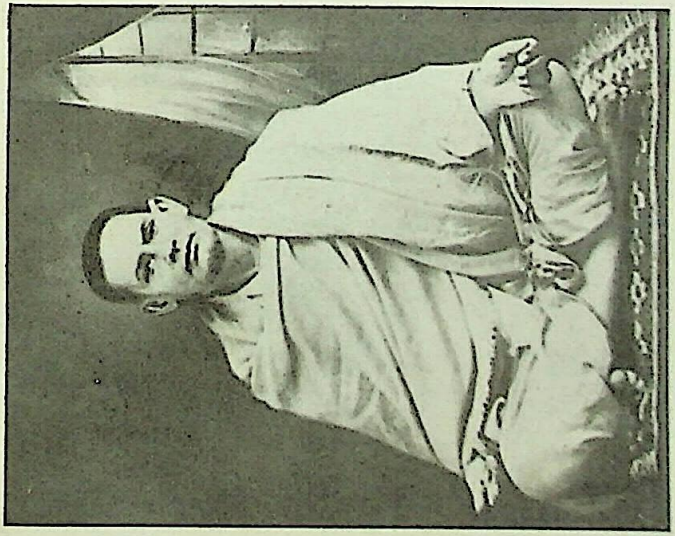


SWĀMI SHIVĀNANDA
(1854—1934)



SWĀMI PREMĀNANDA
(1861—1918)

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SWĀMI AKHANDĀNANDA
(1864—1937)

SWĀMI VIJNĀNĀNANDA
(1868—1938)

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2. The Rāmakrishna Mission Sevāshrama, Kankhal, Dt. Sahārānpur
3. The Rāmakrishna Mission Sevāshrama, Vrindāban, Dt. Mathurā
4. The Rāmakrishna Mission Sevāshrama, Muthiganj, Allahabad
5. The Rāmakrishna Mission Āshrama (orphanage), Sārgāchhi, P.O. Mahulā, Dt. Murshidābād
6. The Rāmakrishna Mission, Barisāl.

The reader will miss some of the centres in India with which we have already become familiar, viz., the Rāmakrishna Math and Mission, Dacca, the Sister Niveditā Girls' School, Calcutta, and the Rāmakrishna Mission Students' Home, Madras. The fact is that they were still in an experimental state, and the Mission did not think it wise to shoulder full responsibility for them at that stage. But they did not lack the fullest co-operation of the main organisation on that account. Another point to note is that the same centre was sometimes discharging dual functions, as, for instance, at Allahabad, where in imitation of a similar arrangement at the Belur Headquarters, two organically different institutions—the Mission Sevāshrama and the Rāmakrishna Math—were being run side by side by the same people, though under different roofs. This was a procedure that was greatly in favour and came more into vogue in course of time. In later days, it was not often thought necessary to have different houses even, though the movable and immovable properties of the two organisations were clearly listed and demarcated. The third point is that the authorities concentrated, for a time, their efforts on developing the existing centres, rather than multiplying their number. And lastly, Governmental suspicion

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made the authorities think twice before formally declaring any institution as their own. The object of this self-denial was to prevent spurious institutions from taking advantage of this loophole and posing as genuine branches of the Belur organisation, thus lowering the latter in the eyes of the public and the Government. Such was the vitiated political atmosphere of the time! On the whole, then, the Math and Mission developed up to 1912 through an internal growth of their existing branch centres, some of which were gradually being converted into multi-purpose institutions. But after 1912 there was a definite tendency to increase the number, notwithstanding the care bestowed on the consolidation of the position at every turn.

To understand the sequence of events in this direction, let us travel with Swāmi Brahmānanda, or Mahārāj as he was called, to various parts of India for a while. We start on March 20, 1912, from the Belur Math, our destination being Kankhal. With Mahārāj travelled Swāmis Shivānanda, Turiyānanda and some other monks. It was characteristic of the head of the organisation that while at this Mission centre, he thought not so much of augmenting its material prosperity as of strengthening its spiritual basis. He decided to worship Mother Durgā there in the image, with all the elaborate ceremonies as in Bengal. A small image was brought from Calcutta, and the worship was duly performed for five days in October. A special feature of the function was the feeding of all the monks of the locality with delicacies unknown to those parts, which fact, more than anything else, made a lasting impression on the conservative section of Upper India, who now conceded that the Rāmakrishna people were religiously minded. Formerly some of them used to twit the Sevāshrama monks as Bhangis, or sweepers—

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considered to be of the lowest caste—because they did menial service to the patients!

From Kankhal Mahārāj went down to Benares with his party, where the worship of Kāli was performed with due solemnity at the Rāmakrishna Advaita Āshrama in the presence of the Holy Mother, who was then staying in a devotee's house near by. At Benares Mahārāj took an opportunity to reaffirm the fundamental belief of the Mission that the service it renders to suffering humanity is really worship of God. On November 9, 1912, the Holy Mother was taken round the premises of the Rāmakrishna Mission Home of Service. She was very much pleased at what she saw and remarked, "The Master himself is present here, and the goddess of wealth resides in her full bounty." After returning home, she sent a ten-rupee note as her donation to the Home. Subsequently, when somebody asked her, "Mother, how did you find the Home of Service?" she replied, "I saw the Master himself present there; that is why all this work is going on. It is all his work." These words were freely circulated, till they reached the ears of Mahārāj. Now Mr. Mahendra Nāth Gupta, the writer of the *Gospel of Sri Rāmakrishna,* was then living at Benares. He held the view, supported by many others, that the idea of service sponsored by Swāmi Vivekānanda did not quite accord with what Shri Rāmakrishna had taught. To test this and have some fun, Mahārāj set the youngsters to heckle Mr. Gupta as he approached the Advaita Āshrama that day. They clustered round him and said in one voice, "Mother has said that the Home of Service is the Master's work, and that he himself is present here. What do you say to it now?" Mr. Gupta understood the joke and replied, "It can no longer be denied." Mahārāj left on April 27, 1913 for the Belur Math.

His next visit to Benares was in October, 1913. This

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time he remained in North India for more than a year, visiting the Math and Mission centres and places of pilgrimage, and returning to the headquarters on November 26, 1914. This long interval was fruitful in deepening the spiritual life of the monks as well as placing the institutions on stronger foundations. His plans developed into fine buildings, his suggestions were worked out as well-laid flower gardens and fruit orchards, and his guidance built up the monastic life in the centres after the true pattern. The monks accompanied him to the temples and, encouraged by him, sang in chorus in praise of the deities; well-known musicians were invited to give recitals before him at the Advaita Āshrama; and local monks of other orders too had their share of respectful attention and entertainment. Thus the Math and Mission institutions learnt under his guidance to become identified with the religious life of the holy cities. On his way back to Belur, he visited Swāmi Vijnānānanda at Allahabad, with whom he stayed for three days.

Mahārāj's next tour was to East Bengal, during which he visited the temple of the goddess Kāmākhyā, near Gauhāti, and laid the foundation of the Rāmakrishna Math at Dacca on its own land on February 13, 1916. After that he went to Nārāyanganj, whence he walked with Swāmi Premānanda and a large party to the house of Durgā Charan Nāg or Nāg Mahāshay who was the greatest householder disciple of the Master and was respected throughout East Bengal for his great saintliness. There Mahārāj went into divine rapture in the midst of a party of singers. Thus, wherever he went, he imparted spirituality. After returning to the Belur Math and resting there for some months, he moved down to South India. We have to note here, however, that along with spiritual progress, which was nearest to the Swāmi's heart, the Math and Mission

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under his Presidentship, were making rapid strides from the material point of view as well, so much so that we must digress, in order to bring the record of them up to date. We shall be well advised to make a survey of the changes in the North before we study the effect of his sojourn in the South.

In 1913 the Belur Math paid attention to its cultural side by starting, with the munificent aid of Jadupati Chatterjee, a Tol or Sanskrit school for the benefit of the monks. It also contemplated admitting students from outside with further facilities for studies. But this project never materialised, mainly for want of funds. It will be remembered that it was a cherished desire of Swāmi Vivekānanda to have a Vedic school at Belur, so much so that even on the last day of his life, he had talked on this subject during a stroll through the village in the company of Swāmi Premānanda.

Along with the Belur Math, the Rāmakrishna Math in Calcutta, which was the Holy Mother's house as well as the *Udbodhan* Office, also progressed rapidly. This publication centre, mainly for Bengali books, brought out most of the writings and speeches of Swāmis Vivekānanda and Sāradānanda. We cannot resist the temptation of adding a few words about the *Shri Shri Rāmakrishna Lilāprasanga,* afterwards translated as *Sri Rāmakrishna the Great Master,* the masterpiece of Swāmi Sāradānanda's genius and a great contribution to Bengali and religious literature, which the Swāmi wrote under circumstances that he alone could tackle. In a tiny room of a small house crowded with visitors and noisy with the talk of young people, the Swāmi sat cross-legged before his low desk and went on writing ceaselessly, at the same time that he attended to the daily duties of the centre as its head, the projects of the Rāmakrishna Math and Mission as their Secretary, and the questions of religious aspirants as their spiritual

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guide. The way, in which he got the idea of writing the book was equally characteristic of him. After the passing away of the Master, a literature was growing round his life and teachings that very often gave distorted pictures. The Swāmi wanted to leave behind an authentic record with a rational interpretation based on the recorded experience of past centuries and the new light thrown on the subject by Swāmi Vivekānanda. Besides, he had run into debt in building that house in 1909 as an expression of his devotion to the Holy Mother. How else could a monk repay the debt when voluntary contribution was not forthcoming? Thus, the sole determination of Swāmi Sāradānanda provided a permanent house for the Holy Mother at the same time that it created an immortal book. From now on, whenever the Holy Mother came to Calcutta, she lived in her new house, which thus became a great centre of attraction for religious-minded men and women. Here hundreds were initiated by her, and quite a number got her blessings for their life of renunciation and service. And here at last on July 21, 1920, she entered into Mahāsamādhi. Accordingly, this house has now become a place of pilgrimage to all the followers and admirers of Shri Rāmakrishna, and to many more besides. The *Udbodhan,* published from this centre, is one of the oldest magazines in Bengali, which has survived many a vicissitude to cater for the spiritual needs of an ever-growing number of readers. The activity of the centre in publishing books is still unabated, and the high standard set up by it is widely appreciated.

The Advaita Āshrama of Māyāvati, perched on the Himālayan heights, was creating its own history during all these years. Swāmi Prajnānanda, as already noted, became its President at the end of 1913. Regarding the success of the English magazine, *Prabuddha Bhārata,* published by the Āshrama, the Second General Report

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of the Mission says, ". . . it has established a permanent place in the field of journalistic literature, discussing the question of the realisation of Indian ideals through religion." The centre specialised in bringing out the English works of Swāmi Vivekānanda and other books on religion. The work grew in volume, and an out-of-the-way place like Māyāvati proved altogether unsatisfactory even for ordinary work, not to speak of any big venture. Consequently attempts were made under the fourth President, Swāmi Mādhavānanda, to shift the publication section to a city. Ultimately in May, 1920, Calcutta was chosen for this purpose. But the Editorial staff continued and still continues at its original location. The charitable dispensary at Māyāvati, already referred to, continued to grow in stature and scope of service.

There was a new arrival in the district. On May 21, 1915, Swāmi Virajānanda founded the Vivekānanda Āshrama at a village called Shyāmalā Tāl, at a height of about 4,500 feet, which was 12 miles above the nearest railway station at Tanakpur, and 30 miles below Māyāvati by the bridle path. Since the opening of a bus route in 1950, the distances of Shyāmalā Tāl from the two places have been 17 and 48 miles. The Swāmi meant it originally to be a place of quiet meditation; but the distress of the poor patients moved him to start, even in November, 1914, when he reached the spot, a small charitable dispensary there. This also grew and had a few indoor beds added to it in 1923.

Still another addition was the Rāmakrishna Kutir at Chilkāpetā, Almorā, in the Himālayas, established in 1916 "for the purpose of forming a retreat for the monastic members of the Mission who want to live the life of meditation and solitude." The Kutir or cottage had a history. In 1897, when Swāmi Shivānanda was about to begin such a life at Almorā, Swāmi Vivekānanda tried to dissuade him saying, "Brother, I won't

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allow you to go in for such an austere life." But finding Swāmi Shivānanda determined, he finally let him go saying, "Then establish a centre at Almorā." Swāmi Shivānanda remembered that behest, though just then he was in no mood to undertake such a responsibility. At last when Swāmi Turiyānanda, suffering from diabetes, required a bracing climate to live in, Swāmi Shivānanda persuaded him to accompany him to Almorā, where he then lived in the out-house of a gentleman, depending for food on begging. There the new Swāmi improved in health, and Swāmi Shivānanda, with his consent, purchased a small plot of land for Rs. 20/-. He also collected some money to start construction, and went down to the plains in this connection. But other duties kept him in Calcutta and elsewhere, so that he never returned to complete the work. Swāmi Turiyānanda, however, pursued the plan; and supplementing the money and materials already collected with some money he had collected himself, he finished a small structure, which was ceremonially opened on May 22, 1916. Unlike most other centres, the Rāmakrishna Kutir still sticks to its early objective, though it has increased its accommodation for more monks and lay guests.

A third centre sprang up under the supervision of Swāmi Karunānanda in 1916 at Kishenpur among picturesque surroundings, on the Dehra-Dun—Mussoorie Road. Opened originally as an experimental measure, the centre was placed on a permanent basis nine years later.

All this while, two other centres were evolving unawares at Jayrāmbāti, the birth-place of the Holy Mother, and at Koālpārā, about five miles away, on the way to the Vishnupur railway station from Jayrāmbāti. For several reasons, the Holy Mother, within a few years of the Master's passing away, had to make

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Jayrāmbāti her permanent home. But after the death of her mother in 1906 and with the growth of her brothers' families and the number of her own disciples, who stayed with her for her service or paid her occasional visits, the need of a separate house for herself and her monastic sons was keenly felt. Out of this necessity was erected a house consisting of a few cottages, at a little distance, on a separate plot of land. It was ceremonially occupied on May 15, 1916. Naturally enough, Swāmi Sāradānanda played a prominent part in securing a portion of the money and supplying the necessary monastic hands for supervisory work. Originally purchased in the Holy Mother's name, the property was formally made over to the Trustees of the Belur Math on July 7, 1916. Another set of cottages was built close to it in 1920, the year of her passing away, to perpetuate her memory. Here an imposing memorial temple was erected, which was dedicated on April 19, 1923. The Math centre at Jayrāmbāti is therefore known as the Mātrimandir or the Mother's temple.

The Koālpārā Āshrama too grew up partly to fill the need of a resting place for the Holy Mother and her devotees on their journeys to and from Jayrāmbāti. The Āshrama was originally started by a local teacher, Kedār Nāth Datta, a great devotee of the Holy Mother, who once, in 1919, spent six months in his house. She also made many shorter visits there. Kedār Nāth, who afterwards embraced the monastic life under the name of Swāmi Keshavānanda, had gathered round him a number of his ex-students, who were devoted heart and soul to the Holy Mother. In 1911 the Āshrama had a weaving section and a charitable dispensary. Later, a free primary school was added. The whole organisation became affiliated to the Mission in 1918. The Āshrama flourished during the lifetime of the Mother.

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But with her departure from this world and the demise of Keshavānanda, it has steadily declined and exists now only in name.

We now turn to the philanthropic activities of the Mission in North India. The headquarters at Belur developed its charitable dispensary, where the number of patients rose from 4,372 in 1917 to 12,514 in 1920. As in past years, during this period also, it organised various types of relief work. It may be remarked in passing that until recently the Belur Headquarters considered it its special charge to undertake this kind of work, with the help of branch centres where possible. For this purpose monastic workers were called from their retreats within or outside the organisation, as also from the centres of work that could spare them, there being no permanent cadre for this because of a shortage of man power. They were assisted by volunteers recruited locally or from neighbouring places. Besides, the Mission had no substantial fund for these operations, the balance left over from the previous work, usually small, being utilised to start a new project and carry it on for a few days till public help was available. For its finances, which at times ran to several thousand rupees, the Mission had to depend in the old days on private charity alone. The conditions regarding the finances for relief work are much the same even today, except that Governmental help is sometimes more readily available. It is a matter of gratification that in those early days, a large-hearted friend, the late Mahesh Chandra Bhattāchārya of Calcutta, gave the Belur authorities a *carte blanche* to start any relief work that was necessary and inform him. He only made two significant stipulations, viz., that his donations should remain anonymous, and that any unused portion should be refunded to him. His generosity ensured the continuance of the work for some time. There has been

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another change in the mode of operation. With the growth of some of the branch centres and their consequently heightened sense of responsibility, these branches themselves often undertake relief works, sometimes very big ones, in their states. This is especially the case in South India, where distance makes it difficult to direct operations from Belur when quick decisions and speedy contacts with local people are called for. The headquarters helps as far as possible with men, and in the case of smaller centres, also with money where necessary.

Another field to which the headquarters directed its attention was the helping of poor deserving students and other indigent people to the extent that its funds would allow.

The Sevāshramas or Homes of Service in North India made substantial progress during these years. In addition to its indoor and outdoor service to poor patients, the Benares Home of Service had added a refuge for invalid men and women in 1912, which gradually became a prominent feature of the institution. The inmates got here not only shelter, but also food and clothing. In addition, the Home of Service distributed door to door relief to some indigent families. It also experimented for a while with educational activities by conducting homes for boys and girls, and spinning and weaving classes, which were closed down in later years as not compatible with the main line of its work, which was medical service. The number of indoor patients rose from 327 in 1910 to 1,034 in 1922, the corresponding figures for the outdoor department being 5,596 and 13,254.

The Sevāshrama at Kankhal gave an equally good account of itself. By the end of 1922 it had its own accommodation for 66 indoor patients, though the need for other ancillary structures still remained unfulfilled.

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The number of its indoor and outdoor patients was 113 and 9,308 respectively in 1910; in 1922 it shot up to 374 and 33,717 respectively.

The Vrindāban Sevāshrama was fortunate enough to secure in 1915 a plot of land on the Jamunā, measuring about 8.32 acres, on which it built a "wretched mud house," so as to shift from its old temporary habitation at Kālā Bābu's Kunja. On the new land it gradually constructed two wards for male and female patients; but another ward for male patients, begun in 1919, could not be completed even in 1922 for want of funds. In spite of such handicaps, the Sevāshrama acquitted itself well, as evidenced by the number of patients in the indoor and outdoor departments in 1922, which stood at 172 and 20,029 respectively, as against 106 and 13,843 in 1910.

Under the Mission's patronage, a new centre of medical relief grew up at Midnapore in 1917, only to be disaffiliated in 1920. Much later (1931) it was again affiliated, to progress steadily as a successful institution, both in the fields of medicine and education.

We now enter into the sphere of educational expansion of the Mission. In Calcutta, a new institution full of great promise and based on high idealism came into prominence under the able guidance of Swāmi Nirvedānanda. Started originally in a rented house to provide coaching classes for college students, it began to give shelter, food, clothing, even tuition fees and books, to poor deserving boys. From 1916 the institution struggled on by itself, till in 1919 it got the formal recognition of the Mission. For want of funds it continued for a long time in cheap rented houses in Central Calcutta; but the college authorities were impressed by the discipline and merit of the inmates of the Rāmakrishna Mission Students' Home, as it came to be called. Some features of the Home as well

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as its outstanding success in university examinations convinced the public that the Mission had some special contribution to make in the domain of education. Accordingly, it began to receive more help. In North India it was the first institution that undertook to mould the character of college students in a spirit of service. It was appropriately called a Home and not a hostel, and the monks looked after the all-round welfare of the boys like dedicated guardian tutors. As a result, the institution was able to turn out some of the finest citizens and monastic workers. Naturally, this Home became the prototype of similar institutions in and outside the Mission. In that sense it has really fulfilled a crying need in India.

Much earlier even than this, Sister Niveditā, as already noted, with the help of Sister Christine, had restarted on the Saraswati Pujā day (February), 1902, her experiments in the education of girls at 17 Bosepara Lane, Bāghbāzār, Calcutta. Begun as a children's school with fifty girls in the first year, the student body dwindled down to twenty only. So it was converted into a combined school, admitting also adult women of the locality, who came to learn reading, writing, needle-work, etc. The school had a high idealism both in the academic and spiritual sense, and it had a social value, since it aimed at training Indian women to take up their own education themselves, thus ensuring independence of action and development on national lines. But funds were lacking, though the goodwill of cultured people was considerable. For voluntary teaching work, Sister Niveditā succeeded in enlisting the honorary services of many ladies of position in Calcutta, for instance, Lābanya Prabhā Basu, sister of Sir J. C. Bose, and Amiyā Devi, daughter of the national leader, Bepin Chandra Pāl ; while Lady Abalā Bose, Srimati Saralā Bālā Sarkār and others assisted at

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different times. The adult section progressed beyond expectation and had to be constituted separately from the Jagaddhātri Pujā day (November) of 1904. The enthusiasm of the two Sisters knew no bounds, and they worked without respite, pressing into service all the latest educational techniques of the West, and training teachers as they advanced. From the very beginning Mrs. Ole Bull bore the financial burden, while many Indians helped in other ways. As days passed by, handicrafts like sewing, embroidery, knitting, spinning and tailoring came more and more into prominence as a regular part of the school course. The efforts of the Sisters were crowned with success when many widows began to earn their livelihood through their training in the school, and two branches were opened before 1912 by the old pupils—one at Hātibāgān in Calcutta and the other at Bally, two miles above Belur.

The success of the Sisters was partly due to their complete identification with Hindu society. They never criticised or questioned even a bad custom, but rather looked below the surface to find out the original idea of which it had become a parody. This genuine love and sympathy touched the hearts of Indian womanhood, whose conservatism was thus won over to the side of progress. But the Sisters could hardly stand the Indian climate. Sister Niveditā fell dangerously ill in 1905, and suffered repeatedly from malaria in the next year also, which permanently impaired her health. The last three years of her life were mostly spent outside India. Returning to India in 1911, she went for a change to Darjeeling, where, as already said, on October 13 she breathed her last at the house of Sir J. C. Bose. Mrs. Ole Bull had died earlier that year on January 18. As a consequence of this double tragedy, the school was faced with disaster, when an Indian friend of the Mission donated Rs. 1,200, and

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Mr. E. G. Thorp of Boston, U.S.A., promised Rs. 200 per month. Sister Christine shouldered the responsibility of management for some time more. But owing to bad health she too had to go back to the U.S.A. in 1914, handing over charge to Sudhirā Bose—sister of Swāmi Prajnānanda—who had been working as a teacher in the school since 1906. Because of the War and for other reasons Sister Christine could not return before 1924 to resume her work. Even this time she stayed only for a short period, to return to the U.S.A. and die in New York on March 24, 1930.

Sudhirā Devi was a worthy successor to the two Sisters. She opened an Āshrama division, called the Mātri-Mandira—a boarding house for the dedicated women workers of the school—which was blessed by the visit and stay of the Holy Mother and the good wishes of Swāmi Sāradānanda. Subsequently the name was changed to Sāradā Mandira, in memory of the Holy Mother. The house also accommodated a few paying boarders. When in 1918 the Benares Home of Service started a home for destitute women of respectable families in order to give them a training to support themselves as an annexe to it, its management was placed in the hands of Sudhirā Devi in recognition of her administrative ability. She continued to manage the Sister Niveditā School as well, till she accidentally fell from a moving train near Benares on November 23, 1920, and died the next day in the Home of Service.

In the meantime steps taken for a permanent home for the school culminated in the purchase on November 5, 1917, of the present site at 5 Niveditā Lane, Bāghbāzār, Calcutta. The institution was affiliated to the Mission in 1918; and with money received as a result of an appeal from the President of the Rāmakrishna Math, the construction of the present building began in 1921, to be completed with further funds in 1923.

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We have dealt with this centre of the Mission rather elaborately, since this was the first institution started and managed almost entirely by women from its very inception up to Sister Sudhirā's death. This was an achievement in itself, since Swāmi Vivekānanda was never tired of telling his followers that the problems of women should be tackled by themselves. As no suitable woman successor to Sudhirā Devi could be found, the management, after her, passed into the hands of Brahmachāri Ganendra Nāth, of whom we shall have to write more in future.

In addition to the Math and Mission centres mentioned in these pages, the Third General Report of the Mission mentions that the Mission had in prospect the affiliation of three more centres in North India—the Rāmakrishna Sevāshrama of Bānkurā, existing from 1917, the Rāmakrishna Sevāshrama of Sonārgāon, Dacca, inaugurated in 1915, and the Rāmakrishna Sevāshrama and Sāradāpitha of Garbetā, Midnapore started in 1916.

With this brief survey of events in the North almost up to 1922, let us proceed with Swāmi Brahmānanda to the South. On July 21, 1916, he started from Belur for Madras with Swāmi Nirmalānanda at the latter's invitation to visit the Bangalore centre, of which he was the head. At Madras they were received by Swāmi Sharvānanda, who had succeeded Swāmi Rāmakrishnānanda as the head of the monastery as also the associated institutions there. The Math building constructed in 1907 had proved to be defective in structure and needed to be pulled down. In anticipation of this a plan had been prepared for a stronger and more commodious building, for which the foundation stone was laid by Mahārāj on August 4, 1916. After a few days he moved up to Bangalore, whence he visited

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other places such as Mysore and Melkot. Finally he started for Cape Comorin at the end of November.

In the years between 1911 and 1916, the work of the Rāmakrishna Mission in Kerala (Malabār and Travancore) had made "a pleasing record of progress." Much had been "done during the period, thanks to the . . . indomitable zeal of Swāmi Nirmalānanda." The project organised under the name of "The Rāmakrishna Kerala Mission, Bangalore" spread to Tiruvellā, where the "foundation stone of the first permanent centre in Travancore" was laid in October, 1912; and work on the Āshrama building at Haripād was commenced in August, 1913. In April, 1914 both the Āshrama buildings were opened, and May, 1915 saw the inauguration of the Āshrama at Quilandy. In October of the same year was started at Quilon the Malayālam journal *Prabudhha Keralam* on the lines of *Prabuddha Bhārata.*

Halting at Haripād and Quilon, Mahārāj reached Trivandrum, where, on December 9, 1916, he laid the foundation of the Rāmakrishna Āshrama seven miles outside the town, on a beautiful hillock, from the top of which could be seen the expanse of the Arabian Sea. Having worshipped Mother Kanyā-Kumāri at the Cape, Mahārāj returned to Bangalore for a month's rest and then came to Madras again, to stay there till the beginning of May. Within this period he visited several places of pilgrimage, opened the new building of the Madras monastery on April 24, 1917, and stayed there since April 30. On May 6 he laid the foundation of the Rāmakrishna Mission Students' Home on a piece of land donated by a generous gentleman, H. C. Srinivāsa Rāghavāchāriār, on Sullivan Garden Road, Mylapore, Madras, the present site of the Home. On May 9 Mahārāj left for Puri.

Despite Swāmi Rāmakrishnānanda's departure in

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1911, the publication department of the Madras Math advanced satisfactorily under the new Swāmi. It brought out in May, 1914, the monthly magazine *Vedānta Kesari*. In a way, this was a successor to the *Brahmavādin*, which had been started with Swāmi Vivekānanda's blessings in 1895, but had ceased to appear after May, 1913, except for the issue of March-April next. The Rāmakrishna Students' Home, now forming a separate unit, was formally recognised as a Mission centre in 1918. About this institution the Second General Report of the Mission predicted, ". . . we are sure that before the next General Report is published, the building [of the Home] will be completed and will stand as a great educational centre of the Rāmakrishna Mission, like the Benares Home of Service in the sphere of Sevā work." The years that followed proved the truth of this prophecy to the very letter. The Government of Madras helped the Home by defraying half the cost of construction. This, by the way, was the first, and for many years the only, time the Mission accepted substantial help from the Government to build up a permanent institution.

At Puri, famous for the temple of Jagannātha, Swāmi Brahmānanda spent six months. This sacred place had a particular fascination for him, and he often talked of having a monastery there. In deference to his wishes, Rāmakrishna Bose, son of Balarām Bose of Calcutta, donated a small piece of land right on the sea in 1911, when the Swāmi was staying there; but the land remained idle, for the monastery was not built until 1932. In the meantime Swāmi Brahmānanda was attracted by the holy atmosphere and salubrious climate of Bhubaneshwar, which also is famous for its Shiva temple, and for the mighty works of ancient kings and religious orders in the form of temples and caves. Once when living in the precincts of the Shiva temple,

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he had felt the natural power of the place to draw the mind Godward. With that memory still fresh in his mind, he now arranged to select a site for a monastery at Bhubaneshwar, purchase it and start construction on it immediately. He then went back to Belur Math, and returned to Bhubaneshwar to open the new monastery on October 31, 1919.

Regarding the Bhubaneshwar Math, Swāmi Brahmānanda entertained the hope that it would serve as a retreat for the monks of the Order and provide for their spiritual and bodily recuperation after sustained work in different Math and Mission centres. But his primary concern for the welfare of the monks did not make him indifferent to the sufferings of the people around. For the alleviation of their distress the Bhubaneshwar Math undertook, at his instance, fire relief work in 1920-21, and added a charitable dispensary as a permanent feature in 1920. And his aesthetic sense found expression in converting the area of the Math into a well-planted orchard and a garden for flowers and vegetables.

In North India more developments took place after the Swāmi's South Indian tour. Jogesh Chandra Ghosh of Calcutta made a gift of his house at Bhowanipur for a Math centre, which was accordingly started on November 17, 1920, under the name of the Gadādhar Āshrama. Another small monastery sprang up in 1921 at Jāmtārā, in Santhāl Parganās, Bihār. The same year also saw the commencement, at the Belur Headquarters, of the Industrial School under the Mission with a score of students, who were given free board and lodging along with free education. An orphanage started in 1912 at Barnagore came to be recognised as a Mission centre about this time. At the end of 1922, it maintained 22 orphans. Another institution that received recognition by the Mission and was destined

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to play a big part in the educational sphere, was the Rāmakrishna Mission Āshrama at Sarishā, about twenty-four miles south of Calcutta, on the Calcutta-Diamond Harbour Road. Started in 1917 as a meeting-place for religious-minded people and a centre for distributing help to the needy, it became almost defunct in 1920 after the death of its chief organiser, Nalini Ranjan Majumdār. It was revivified and put on a working basis, with the advent of Swāmi Ganeshānanda on the scene, on December 25, 1921.

It will be evident from a cursory glance at these developments that during the second half of Swāmi Brahmānanda's tenure of office, the emphasis was extending to educational institutions. Not only in the South, but in the North as well, new educational centres began to spring up, and the older centres started experimenting with various types of educational work like primary schools, night schools, vocational courses and orphanages, most of which live even today with added strength, while some were given up in favour of more practicable schemes in other fields. In addition to the educational institutions already listed, we may mention the Students' Home at Bangalore, started in August, 1919 ; the taking over in June, 1921, of the Girls' School in George Town, Madras, by the Math there, renaming it as the Rāmakrishna Math Niveditā Girls' School ; founding of a primary school by the Dacca Mission centre ; and the establishment of a school by the Mission centre at Sārgāchhi.

In addition, almost all the centres maintained libraries for the benefit of the reading public, and many of them conducted public classes and organised annual celebrations and lectures. Besides, the monks were ever on the move contacting the masses and telling them of the new order of things taking shape around Shri Rāmakrishna.

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The happiness consequent on this success, however, was not unmixed with sorrow; for the remaining disciples and standard-bearers of the Master were leaving this world one by one. Swāmi Trigunātita had a tragic end in San Francisco in 1915. Swāmi Premānanda, who by his two tours in East Bengal in 1916 and 1917 had sown the seeds of future Rāmakrishna centres, but had contracted kala-azar, then fell a victim to epidemic influenza, in Calcutta on July 30, 1918. Swāmi Adbhutānanda too passed away at Benares on April 24, 1920. But the most poignant event was the Holy Mother's entering into final beatitude at her Calcutta residence on July 21, 1920. More such events followed soon after 1920, which we shall refer to in due course. Altogether it was very depressing. Nevertheless, the remaining stalwarts, though mortified, stuck to their guns.

After the sacred body of the Holy Mother had been cremated on the river-side at the Belur Math, the first thought of Swāmi Sāradānanda was to erect two temples in her memory—one on the cremation ground at the Math and the other at Jayrāmbāti, on the holy spot of her nativity. The temple at Belur was completed, and consecrated on December 21, 1921, the birthday of the Mother.

It is high time now to look at the changes occurring outside India. Though for obvious reasons the Math and Mission were expanding more in India than outside, it must not be assumed that the monks at the headquarters loved their foreign work less. They could never do so in the face of the clear direction of Swāmi Vivekānanda, "Preaching work keeps the vitality of an organisation in vigour; hence you must never cease from preaching work." It is the foreign work, in the first instance, that brought the Swāmi name, fame and success in India. Swāmiji had declared: "The only

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condition of national life, of awakened and vigorous national life, is the conquest of the world by Indian thought." "Therefore we must go out, exchange our spirituality for anything they have to give us; for the marvels of the region of Spirit we will exchange the marvels of the region of matter. We will not be students always, but teachers also. There cannot be friendship without equality." "At the same time you must not forget that what I mean by the conquest of the world by spiritual thought, is the sending out of the life-giving principles, not the hundreds of superstitions that we have been hugging to our breasts for centuries." "I believe that by this cultivation of religion and the wider diffusion of Vedānta, both this country and the West will gain enormously. To me the pursuit of politics is a secondary means in comparison with this." These were the living words that still rang clearly in the ears of the leaders. They had to act with determination.

The Math authorities, however, work under certain limitations which are a blessing in disguise. They have not as many trained monks as they would like to spare for the foreign lands. Secondly, not having the kind of financial backing the foreign missions generally have, they are not at all rich, and they do not try to convert. Their appeal is in the name of Vedānta as an all-comprehensive philosophical religion that can knit together the people of the world into a universal brotherhood. The method of work can best be presented in the words of Dr. Dorothy F. Mercer, an eye-witness: "The Swāmis in America are directly responsible to the Rāmakrishna Math. They have no central head in the United States. . . . Each centre is an independent, self-sustaining unit, governed by its members, who are all American citizens. The Swāmis, coming as they do on invitation, are guest teachers,

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rather than missionaries. They own nothing and maintain themselves through the pleasures of the membership. The number of members of each centre varies and is largely dependent on the appeal made by the individual Swāmi. Because the unequivocal stand of the Vedānta does not lend itself to sentimental compromise and is not very palatable, after the initial wonder, to an outgoing temperament like the American, the membership has never been large. Concentrating on the individual, the Swāmi does not take more students than he can handle personally. He makes no effort to advertise, and is not, in the American sense, an active member of his community. Actually, his students seek him; he does not seek them" (*The Vedanta in California*).

In our last survey, we left Swāmi Bodhānanda working in New York, Swāmi Paramānanda and Sister Devamātā in Boston and Washington, and Swāmis Trigunātita and Prakāshānanda in San Francisco, while Swāmi Abhedānanda lived in his Berkshire retreat. Towards the end of 1914, Swāmi Prakāshānanda made a successful lecturing tour of six weeks through Oregon and the State of Washington. After returning to San Francisco he opened a new centre in another part of the city, under the name of "Pacific Vedānta Centre." Then a most tragic thing happened. When delivering a sermon late in December, 1914, Swāmi Trigunātita was hit by a bomb thrown on to the pulpit by a Western religious fanatic, who himself died on the spot. The Swāmi had no ill will against the murderer; rather with blessings on his lips for this madman, he succumbed to his injuries in a hospital on January 10, 1915. Swāmi Prakāshānanda, engaged in his new activity, could not take up the work of the Vedānta Society just then. So it had to be managed for a time by some students of Swāmi Trigunātita. Finally, Swāmi

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Prakāshānanda assumed charge of the Vedānta Society from the beginning of 1916. He discontinued the *Voice of Freedom* after March, 1916. With the passing away of Swāmi Trigunātita, the monastery and the nunnery too ceased to exist. But in other departments Swāmi Prakāshānanda proved his worth. After a sojourn in India extending from the end of 1922 to April of the next year, he brought Swāmi Prabhavānanda with him as his assistant, to cope with the increased volume of work.

We must also mention the valuable work done in California by Swāmi Abhedānanda, who went there quite often and stayed for months at a stretch to preach Vedānta.

Equally effective were Swāmi Bodhānanda's efforts in New York, so much so that he could dispose of the encumbered old premises and remove the Society in 1915 to its permanent Home at 34 West 71st Street, which was purchased for $40,000, donated by a student, Miss Mary Morton.

The centre in Boston grew under the guidance of Swāmi Paramānanda and Sister Devamātā. On May 21, 1914, it came to be located in its own building at 1 Queensberry Street. The Swāmi produced more books of his own and translated the *Gitā* and the Upanishads, which became popular, as also the monthly, *The Message of the East*. He again visited Europe in 1913 and 1914, when he lectured and held classes on the Vedānta for a short time in Paris and Geneva. In 1916 the Swāmi did similar work in Los Angeles for about five months, as a result of which a Vedānta Centre was started there in August. In subsequent years also Swāmi Paramānanda did effective preaching work in the mid-eastern States.

Before we finish our account of the foreign centres, we shall have to deal with the developments of Mission

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work in two more countries, one of which still formed a part of India. We mean Burma and Malaya (formerly the Federated Malay States).

Swāmi Rāmakrishnānanda's visit to Rangoon gave a great impetus to the Rāmakrishna movement. This movement had been organised there under the Rāmakrishna Sevaka Samiti by Kālipada Ghosh, a disciple of Shri Rāmakrishna. In 1910 another Society came to be formed on similar lines by a group of South Indian devotees. In 1916 Swāmi Sharvānanda, the Second President of the Madras Math, visited Rangoon at the joint invitation of the two societies, which became united under his auspices as the "Rāmakrishna Society." His second visit was equally fruitful, since during this stay, Shashi Bhushan Neogy, a merchant of Rangoon, donated Rs. 10,000 for a guest house to be placed under the Mission. In September, 1919, flood relief work was started in the Amherst district of Burma under the leadership of Swāmi Shyāmānanda. The Swāmi then came to Rangoon with his assistant Swāmi Dhyānānanda to stay at the guest house, now finished, and from there to carry on Vedānta work. In January, 1921, he opened a Sevāshrama or hospital at East Rangoon, in the sheds erected by the Burma Government for a temporary hospital during the influenza epidemic of 1918. This Sevāshrama, thus begun humbly, was to play a very important role in the field of medical work in Burma. The Society and the Sevāshrama, first organised as a single unit, were later divided into two independent branches of the Mission for administrative convenience.

The Vivekānanda Āshrama of Kuala Lumpur, (now capital of) Malaya, had been in existence since 1903. In 1919 it came to be associated with the Rāmakrishna Mission as a result of the lecturing tour of Swāmi Sharvānanda, who arrived there on June 2.

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Swāmi Videhānanda was sent from India by August to take charge of the reorganised centre.

Meanwhile, Swāmi Sāradānanda had long been engaged in solving an organisational problem at Benares, but had not fully succeeded. So he came to Bhubaneshwar to seek the help of Swāmi Brahmānanda in setting things right. That was in the beginning of 1921, though the troubles had been brewing from long before that. The way the two leaders tackled the problems revealed at its best the technique they had developed for the smooth working of their religious organisation; and this was nothing more than the stimulation of love, spiritual fervour and the democratic attitude of making concessions to each other's opinion. It will help us in the elucidation of subsequent events if we study these problems as well as their solution with a little attention. The intervening circumstances were as follows:

Swāmi Sāradānanda had reached Benares on November 25, 1919, and stayed in the Advaita Āshrama for two months, helping, by intimate study and personal example, the monks of both that Āshrama and the Home of Service to get over their difficulties. There were bickerings and misunderstandings between the two centres, as also among the inmates of each. And in the Home of Service, the methods of management followed by the head and some of his lieutenants seemed to others to be outmoded and autocratic. Along with this general feeling of uneasiness, other factors, such as the workers' lack of faith in the life adopted, combined to vitiate the atmosphere. Swāmi Sāradānanda talked with all freely and inspired the workers with the true spirit of service. A Brahmachārin complained that he was overworked, and that he could not reconcile himself to the duty of collecting rice from house to house for the work of the Home.

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Without a word, Swāmi Sāradānanda took up the bag for begging and set out on the errand. This opened the eyes of the whole community.

After an on-the-spot study of the situation with sympathy, patience and diligence, and after consulting Swāmi Turiyānanda, then ailing at the Home, he framed a scheme of remedial measures and placed it before the others. According to this, a Workers' Board was to be set up for the Home with some representatives of the Home of Service and two of the Advaita Āshrama, which would be in charge of the internal administration, under the general guidance of the Managing Committee of the Home. Decisions were to be taken by a majority of votes. The women's section of the hospital, together with its women nurses, was to be separated by a wall from the men's section, the details of internal administration being left to the women themselves, although there would be a united management at the top. While this proposal was generally acceptable, some, particularly the old executives, opined that Swāmi Brahmānanda should be consulted, and that if he agreed, they would abide by the scheme. Without taking the least offence at this, Swāmi Sāradānanda communicated the whole matter to Mahārāj, who wrote back, blessing the scheme and declaring that he was absolutely at one with the Secretary. There it rested. But on January 1, 1920, a group of seniors approached Swāmi Sāradānanda at the Advaita Āshrama in a dejected mood. The Swāmi at once probed their problem, sprang up with folded hands and said to them entreatingly, "Do forget the past. While engaged in the work of the Master and Swāmiji, don't you be creating bad blood amongst yourselves over petty matters. I beseech you with folded hands to trust and love one another. That will solve all the problems." The monks were by far his

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juniors, almost his disciples. So this earnest appeal, made with such humility, had its effect. Entirely disarmed, they went back one by one. Finding things thus settled, the Swāmi returned to Calcutta on January 20, 1920.

Unfortunately, this calm could not be maintained for long; the misunderstanding had by then become too deep-seated. From mere internal skirmishing it now threatened to be directed against the central administration at Belur. It was with this apprehension in mind that Swāmi Sāradānanda had gone to Bhubaneshwar to persuade Mahārāj to visit Benares in his company. And Mahārāj complied, reaching the Home of Service, Benares, on January 20, 1921.

Swāmi Brahmānanda's presence had an instantaneous salutary effect, though, curiously enough, he never talked about business, but rather on high spiritual topics. He had diagnosed the disease as lack of spirituality; and the cure lay in heightening the spiritual ardour. In his august presence petty-mindedness took flight, and the scheme drawn up by Swāmi Sāradānanda a year before was given full play, leading to satisfaction all around. The whole process culminated in Swāmi Brahmānanda's initiating thirty-five persons into Sannyāsa and Brahmacharya on January 30, 1921, the birthday of Swāmi Vivekānanda, and a public meeting in commemoration of that day at the Advaita Āshrama on February 6, in which Swāmi Sāradānanda presided and delivered a highly impressive speech on the philosophy of selfless work. Chāru Chandra, the virtual founder of the Home of Service, also embraced monasticism, and then decided to retire from active work for good. Swāmi Kālikānanda, therefore, stepped into his place. The immediate work in hand having thus been concluded with success, Swāmis Brahmā-

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nanda and Sāradānanda returned to Belur and Calcutta respectively.

In May, 1921, Swāmi Brahmānanda left for Madras with Swāmi Shivānanda to open the newly constructed permanent building of the Rāmakrishna Mission Students' Home, which he did on the 10th of the month. From this day the Home came to adolescence, as it were, and began to grow palpably in stature. One of its great achievements was the starting of a residential High School in 1922, with a view to providing an intensive course of training, under ideal conditions, for the boys of the Home there itself, thus eliminating the need of their going outside to distant schools, and wasting valuable time that could be utilised for extra-curicular activities of educative value. Besides, Swāmi Vivekānanda had extolled the Gurukula system of education prevailing in ancient India, which consisted in living under the loving care of the teacher, who looked after the all-round growth of the boys—spiritual, moral, intellectual and physical. According to the Swāmi, a boy could derive the fullest benefit of edifying, character-building and man-making education in a residential school alone. In his scheme, the academic content of the course of study mattered very much; but when under an alien Government, a truly national education, seeking to preserve cultural integrity and advance the country along the national lines, could not be ensured, the best alternative was to inject as much of national bias into the existing system as circumstances would permit. The Students' Home stepped forward to grasp this idea and profit by it. It also fulfilled Swāmiji's wishes further by adding a technical section in 1925.

Mahārāj continued in the South for another six months, during which period he instructed and helped many spiritual aspirants. He visited Bangalore also.

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In Madras he had the worship of Goddess Durgā performed in the image, just as he had done at Kankhal. This was a novel but elevating experience for the South Indian devotees, who enjoyed it so much that they still remember those happy days and talk of them with palpable enthusiasm. Mahārāj left Madras on November 19, 1921 for Bhubaneshwar, whence he went to Belur on the 12th January, 1922.

And now the curtain was being rung down on this fascinating spiritual drama that was Swāmi Brahmānanda's life. The Master had foretold, "Rākhāl will part with his body as soon as he knows his true nature." From all indications it now appeared that he had done so at last. Eternal companion of the Eternal Player that he was, he was tired of this earthly play, and as he lay on his last sick-bed at Balarām Bose's house in Calcutta, where, after recovering from an attack of cholera, he was undergoing treatment for virulent diabetes, he talked audibly, to the consternation of all, of his visions of the divine play in which he himself was taking part. Swāmi Sāradānanda was near by. Swāmi Shivānanda, who had gone to East Bengal with Swāmi Abhedānanda on a preaching tour, hurried back to his bed-side. They as well as all others prayed fervently for his life, and expert physicians were in attendance. But all attempts to bring him round failed. On April 10, 1922, he entered into Mahāsamādhi.

It was a paralysing blow to the whole organisation, from which it could not recover for years to come. For who indeed could replace Swāmi Brahmānanda? And yet misfortune never comes singly. Within four months, on July 21, Swāmi Turiyānanda passed away at Benares. The Swāmi's austerity, deep understanding of spiritual problems, profound scholarship and inspiring talks on divine topics which were based on his personal experience, were things rarely to be found anywhere.

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Though he had practically retired from active life after his return from the West in 1902, he was still a potent force in the organisation, inasmuch as all monks desiring spiritual uplift sat reverently at his feet for illumination. Most of all, the Home of Service at Benares, where he spent his closing years, profited immensely by his teachings, which have only partially been recorded and published. These along with his equally inspiring letters form a class by themselves; they are a priceless treasure for all seekers of truth.

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A QUINQUENNIUM OF PROGRESS

(1922-1927)

Mahārāj was no longer in his physical body; his brother-disciples and his disciples missed him at every turn. But his spirit still hovered over the organisation and inspired it to push on with the work of service in spite of irreparable bereavements. In the proceedings of the Trustees' meeting held at the Belur Math on April 18, 1922, we read, "Swāmi Shivānanda and Swāmi Sāradānanda were nominated as candidates for the office [of the President], and it was decided that all the Trustees, the senior monastic monks and the majority opinion of members of all the important Āshramas be consulted in the matter and their opinion recorded for the consideration of the Trustees." This was in deference to the direction of Swāmi Vivekānanda that the organisation should be broad-based without sacrificing the reverence due to the elders that is *sine qua non* of a religious order. The Trustees then sat in deliberation on May 2, 1922, to elect their President. When the opinions received were read, it was found that there was a predominant majority in favour of Swāmi Sāradānanda. So Swāmi Shivānanda proposed: "Since almost all want Sharat (Swāmi Sāradānanda), let him be the President." But the latter declined firmly saying, "Swāmiji (Swāmi Vivekānanda) made me Secretary of the Mission, and I don't want to relinquish the post." Then he proposed Swāmi Shivānanda's name for the Presidentship. Swāmi Shivānanda, with his introspective bent of mind, appeared to be an ascetic of the old type, outspoken and not caring much

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about social formalities, which he considered to have a touch of insincerity. Moreover, he did not feel at home in dealing with complex administrative problems. But against his hesitation there was the reassuring persuasion of Swāmi Sāradānanda, the successful hero of a hundred battles, who said, "For those executive complexities, I am there always at your service," and to demonstrate fully that he meant what he said, he prostrated himself before the President of his choice. So Swāmi Shivānanda was unanimously elected to succeed Swāmi Brahmānanda.

Born, as it is supposed, on November 16, 1854, Swāmi Shivānanda was now the oldest member of the Order. At the instance of Swāmi Vivekānanda, he had come to be known popularly as Mahāpurush Mahārāj, meaning a saint. On the reorganisation of the Rāmakrishna Maṭh under Swāmi Vivekānanda's Trust Deed of 1901, he became one of the Trustees. On August 25, 1910, he was elected Vice-President of the Mission, in which position he continued almost till his elevation to Presidentship. On the death of Swāmi Premānanda in 1918, the duties of the Treasurer of the Mission as well as the task of looking after the Belur Math also devolved on him. And we noted earlier that he was instrumental in founding the Advaita Āshrama at Benares, and the Rāmakrishna Kutir at Almorā. On the whole, he had a good record of service to the organisation as well as an intense spiritual life and seniority to merit the present elevation. But what seems to have weighed with Swāmi Sāradānanda was his selfless desire fully to utilise the high spiritual qualities of Swāmi Shivānanda for the good of the Order, while he himself could continue to look after the business side of the organisation, for which he was pre-eminently fitted. It was thus a wise and useful division of labour that he effected by this voluntary self-abnegation. This

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sort of self-effacement was not a rare occurrence in the life of Swāmi Sāradānanda. In 1918 Swāmi Umānanda left the Vrindāban centre after giving due intimation to Swāmi Sāradānanda through a letter, which was somehow misplaced and not read until later. When Umānanda reached the Swāmi's presence, he was scolded for what appeared to be wilfulness. Subsequently, however, the letter was found, whereupon Swāmi Sāradānanda apologised to Umānanda, although the latter was at least thirty years his junior. Not satisfied with that, he went to Swāmi Brahmānanda to plead to be relieved of his office for incompetence, because he had lost his temper and found fault with another on insufficient evidence!

Swāmi Shivānanda, for his own part, fulfilled expectations. He was an ideal monk who loved the work of the Master and Swāmiji whole-heartedly. So long as Swāmi Sāradānanda lived, Swāmi Shivānanda relied entirely on his wisdom to take care of the business affairs, although as a matter of course Swāmi Sāradānanda and others kept him informed of all important developments and sought his advice before taking any far-reaching decision. After Swāmi Sāradānanda's passing away, Swāmi Shivānanda had perforce to play a more active part, because then he was almost the last effective link between the past and the present at the headquarters. Swāmi Shivānanda entered office in all humility and with an utter absence of egotism. These were the strong points of his character throughout life. After being elected as President, he used to say, "As for myself, I am only a servant of Swāmi Brahmānanda. And as Bharata ruled the kingdom in the name of Shri Rāma, placing the latter's sandals on the throne, so am I conducting the work with Mahārāj's sandals on my head. I move as he directs." The Swāmi loved dogs. Pointing to one of these pets with one hand, and

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with the other hand showing a picture of the Master on the wall of his room, he would say, "This one is my dog, and this one (meaning himself) is his dog." And as the years rolled by, the little roughnesses that had appeared in his character in the earlier days mellowed down, and he was all sweetness to those who came to him for solace and spiritual guidance. This change had begun earlier, when he was conducting the Belur Math as successor to Swāmi Premānanda. One day, noticing that some young men who used to come to Swāmi Premānanda fought shy of him and came less frequently to the Math, he told them frankly that he understood their inner feelings—they missed the love of Swāmi Premānanda. But he assured them that he too would love them equally. The young men then mixed with him more freely, and ultimately joined the Order. As for initiating someone into discipleship, he would say, "Look here, my son, I don't have the feeling that I am initiating anybody. It is the Master who inspires his devotees to come here, and I speak whatever he directs me to from within. The Master is my inmost soul." His talk was only about Shri Rāmakrishna, the Holy Mother and Swāmi Vivekānanda. As long as he could walk, he never for a day missed going to the shrine long before sunrise, and sitting there in meditation for hours. In fact, his duty as President was to keep the spiritual lamp burning bright and steady, and he discharged this to perfection. In one thing he remained unchanged: he was the austere monk *par excellence* all his life.

We shall now turn our attention to the main trends of events during the quinquennium we are dealing with, as set forth in the Fourth (1923-24) and the Fifth (1925-27) General Report of the Mission.

Swāmi Abhedānanda, who left the United States for good on July 27, 1921, stopped at Honolulu to

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attend the Pan-Pacific Educational Conference as a delegate, on August 11. From there he arrived at Calcutta on November 10 via Japan and Burma. He was heartily welcomed by the brotherhood at Belur, as also by the general public of Calcutta and other places. His visit to Jamshedpur on January 10, 1922, was very successful, and so was his lecture tour in East Bengal in the company of Swāmi Shivānanda. They reached Dacca on February 14 and Mymensing on February 24. At the latter place they laid the foundation of a temple of Shri Rāmakrishna. Then they returned singly to the bed-side of Swāmi Brahmānanda, who was about to take his final leave.

Habituated for a quarter of a century to the Western mode of life, Swāmi Abhedānanda found it difficult to adjust himself to the conditions prevailing at Belur in those days, with too many monks in each room and a very poor standard of living. He pleaded with Swāmi Brahmānanda to put up an upper storey over the guest house for him at his own expense. After the demise of Swāmi Brahmānanda, Swāmi Abhedānanda entrusted this work to another Swāmi and then left for Shillong. The proceedings of the Trustees' meeting dated June 13, 1922, record: "While the construction was going on, complaints were lodged by some donors, several Mission members and a guest . . . that on no account any private residential quarters be allowed to be built on the guest house . . . "; so the Trustees decided "that Swāmi Abhedānanda be offered the library room of the Math for his own use as long as his quarters are not built in another site to be approved by him." Accordingly Swāmi Abhedānanda was informed by Swāmi Sāradānanda that as the guest house was meant for guests, it would not be proper to build on it a permanent residence for him. Swāmi Abhedānanda's problem of accommodation, therefore, remained

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unsolved. In the meantime he planned a long tour of Kāshmir and Tibet, on which he started soon after his visit to Shillong. He returned to Calcutta on December 11, 1922. Reinstated now in his Trusteeship and hence membership of the Governing Body, he tried to persuade his colleagues to shift at least the Mission headquarters to Calcutta, where it could be in more effective touch with the public, and where he could live and be more useful in the way he had trained himself to be in the West. As the Governing Body could not accede to his request, he decided to live in Calcutta all by himself from February 20, 1923, when he leased premises No. 48B Mechhuābāzār Street. That was the prelude to more drastic steps. On May 1 he changed to 11 Eden Hospital Road, where, as his Bengali biographer notes (*Jivan-kathā,* p. 474), he started the Vedānta Society, working along his own lines. Personal monastic disciples gathered round him one by one. As yet it was not a split. The Third General Report of the Mission, published in 1925, lists the Rāmakrishna Vedānta Society of Calcutta among those centres about which it is written, "They are as yet but loosely connected with the Rāmakrishna Order, but there is a prospect of their being recognised centres of the Order some day." As yet Swāmi Abhedānanda himself maintained the best of friendly relations with the monks of the Belur Math and its branches, who, in their turn, paid him frequent visits. Besides, he continued to be a Trustee of the Math and therefore a member of the Governing Body of the Mission till the last day, though with advancing age and preoccupation with the works of the Society, it became increasingly difficult for him to go to Belur to attend the meetings, and during the closing years he ceased altogether to attend them.

All this time, the Vedānta Society was expanding. In November 1924, Swāmi Abhedānanda purchased

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some land at Darjeeling, where a year later he established the Rāmakrishna Vedānta Āshrama. On July 27, 1925, the Society in Calcutta moved to 40 Beadon Street, where too the old Swāmis of the Belur Math paid him occasional visits, though it was more and more apparent that the Society was daily drifting away from the parent body into an independent career. On March 6, 1926, the monks of all the Rāmakrishna centres near about were invited to a feast at the Vedānta Society. Swāmi Shivānanda too came, though Swāmi Sāradānanda could not, owing to indisposition. It was a last-minute attempt at an emotional *rapprochement,* but it was unsuccessful. So, imperceptibly but unmistakably, the two institutions —the Math and Mission on one side, and the Vedānta Society on the other—parted company with no unfriendly feelings. Here we leave the Society, well set on its own independent career, to return to our main topic.

In the American theatre of activity, Swāmi Prakāshānanda and Swāmi Prabhavānanda aroused so much interest in San Francisco that the Temple auditorium was almost filled to capacity. Its appendage, the Shānti Āshrama, meanwhile had been losing its importance as a place of training. As the Fourth General Report of the Mission records, "At the Shānti Āshrama, California no regular summer classes were held, but groups of Vedānta students made pilgrimages there from time to time and spent a few days in seclusion and meditation."

In the meantime, with the active encouragement of Swāmi Prakāshānanda, a new centre had emerged at Portland, Oregon, in November, 1925, under the care of Swāmi Prabhavānanda. Thus another Swāmi was needed to assist in San Francisco, and Swāmi Dayānanda was sent there in June, 1926.

But 1927 was a bad year for the San Francisco Vedānta Society, for it lost on February 13, 1927,

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Swāmi Prakāshānanda, who breathed his last after working there for over twenty years, spreading the message of Vedānta. He was succeeded in June, 1927, by Swāmi Mādhavānanda, who was relieved from the Presidentship of the Advaita Āshrama, Māyāvati, to take up this important task on the other side of the Pacific Ocean.

The centre in New York had been growing through the steady endeavours of Swāmi Bodhānanda; so Swāmi Rāghavānanda had to go there to assist him, arriving in June, 1923. The latter, however, returned to India in 1927 to recover his health, and Swāmi Jnāneshwarānanda was sent to fill up the vacancy.

Swāmi Paramānanda's work at the Vedānta Society in Boston and his frequent lecturing tours in different parts of the country made a very good impression on the cultured public. As a tangible result of this, there sprang up in April, 1923, a branch of the Boston Centre —a peace retreat named the Ānanda Āshrama—on 135 acres of land, 2200 feet above the sea level, at La Crescenta, 16 miles from Los Angeles, in the arms of the beautiful Sierra Madre Mountains in California. To assist him in this work, Swāmi Paramānanda brought with him from India, where he had gone to attend the first Convention of the Rāmakrishna Math and Mission, Swāmi Akhilānanda, who joined the La Crescenta Āshrama in June, 1926.

So, on the whole, the work of the organisation was spreading steadily in the U.S.A., adding new permanent centres and requiring more monks to look after them. In India too the movement was progressing—even more rapidly than in the West. In fact, there was a demand for almost boundless expansion, as is evidenced by the innumerable Rāmakrishna institutions started unofficially by the devotees and admirers of the Master. The spread of the Math and Mission proper was held in

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check only by the shortage of monastic helpers and the need of proceeding cautiously so as not to endanger efficiency and permanence. Besides, it was becoming evident that the expansion of work could take two forms—multiplying the number of centres and increasing the volume of work in the existing ones. For a time both these processes went on simultaneously, though unconsciously each acted as a brake on the other. And we shall see as we proceed that in the end the emphasis shifted to efficiency and internal growth, so that multiplication of centres came almost to a dead stop. The urge for expansion was particularly noticeable in the case of Mission centres, for the sympathy of the public went more toward these than to the Math centres, which struggled on, despite the lack of financial backing, along their wonted path.

Swāmi Shubhānanda, or Chāru Bābu, the chief organiser of the Rāmakrishna Mission Home of Service, Benares, retired from active management in 1921, handing over charge to Swāmi Kālikānanda. He felt that the workers of the Home needed some retreat for a period of rest and introspection in order to maintain their health and mental poise. The idea was endorsed by Swāmis Turiyānanda and Sāradānanda. The latter advised the purchase of about $1\frac{1}{2}$ acres of land with two houses, available at Kishenpur, by taking a loan. It was contiguous to the Āshrama started in 1916 by Swāmi Karunānanda. The advice was acted upon and the property secured in 1925 for Rs. 4,500 in the names of Swāmis Shivānanda and Sāradānanda, the then President and Secretary of the Math. Swāmi Shubhānanda lived there with others for some time.

By the end of 1927 the Math and Mission had entered into diverse kinds of activity according to the general programme of Swāmi Vivekānanda, and in response to the public demand. We have given illustra-

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tions of the various types of relief work, which figured very prominently in the early days of the Mission, as they have done subsequently also, with the difference that, latterly, the size of the operations has increased immensely. In terms of money, the relief activities in some cases have involved not thousands of rupees, but hundreds of thousands, while the areas covered, and hence the numbers served, have been proportionately vast. Nevertheless, the permanent institutions, with their multiplicity of functions, began to come more and and more to the foreground, eclipsing even the ever-expanding relief projects.

Of such centres, we have mentioned often enough those specialising in medical service—the indoor hospitals and outdoor dispensaries. We present here the comparative figures for 1923 and 1927 to illustrate our point that the institutions were growing internally by leaps and bounds. The number of patients served by the outdoor dispensary at Belur rose from 10,792 in 1923 to 22,063 in 1927. As against 1,126 indoor and 14,929 outdoor patients at the Benares Home of Service, the corresponding numbers for 1927 were 1,720 and 23,267. In the Kankhal Sevāshrama, the indoor and outdoor figures for 1923 were 553 and 12,757, as against 781 and 21,000 respectively in 1927. The figures for the Vrindāban Sevāshrama were 180 and 17,652 in the indoor and outdoor departments in 1923, whereas the corresponding figures in 1927 were 269 and 27,986. The Sevāshrama at Rangoon with its 76 beds treated 1,183 indoor and 33,677 outdoor cases in 1923; the figures stood at 1,616 and 42,310 in 1927. These are only typical instances, and we do not propose to tax the reader's patience by marshalling more figures.

Relief and medical aid were the two departments in which, by the end of 1927, the Mission earned its reputation. But it was making its impact felt in the

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domain of education also, as already pointed out. The educational activities took different forms like Students' Homes for boys and girls, orphanages, general schools ranging from the Primary and Night Schools to High Schools both for boys and girls, and vocational schools. There were attempts at mass education also with magic-lantern lectures etc. A new development was the starting of residential schools in 1922. As a matter of fact, we shall not be overshooting the mark if we assert that from 1920 onward, the Mission was definitely turning its attention from mere medical service to educational activities. This was quite in keeping with Swāmi Vivekānanda's ideas and directions.

On April 24, 1897, he wrote, "If we are to rise again, we shall have to do so . . . by spreading education among the masses." About the relative importance of famine relief and the development of the earning capacity of the masses through education, he wrote on July 11, 1897, "All the wealth of the world cannot help one Indian village, if the people are not taught to help themselves. Our work should be mainly educational, both moral and intellectual." On the kind of general education provided in our country his views were: "We have had a negative education all along from our boyhood. We have only learnt that we are nobodies. . . . Nothing positive has been taught to us. We do not even know how to use our hands and feet! We have learnt only weakness." "It would be better if the people got a little technical education so that they might find work and earn their bread instead of dawdling about and crying for service." "The ideal of all education, all training should be man-making. Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested all your life. We must have life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas." "What we

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want are Western science coupled with Vedānta, Brahmacharya as the guiding motto, and also Shraddhā and faith in one's own self." "Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man. I look upon religion as the innermost core of education."

In presenting the bare outlines of a national system of education based on religion, Swāmiji emphasised certain traits of character that had to form the keystone of the structure. There should be concentration and detachment, coupled with chastity in thought, word and deed, and faith in one's own inherent power as well as in the greatness of the nation in the past, present and future. And character had to be strengthened through a strengthening of the will by following a process of positive effort, and not a merely negative system of punishment, reproof and discouragement. Along with all this there was to be a pure and beautiful environment, where the teacher and the taught could live in an atmosphere of mutual love and reverence. "My idea of education," said he, "is . . . living in the house of the teacher. [A man] should live from his very boyhood with one whose character is like a blazing fire, and should have before him a living example of the highest teaching. . . . In our country the imparting of knowledge has always been through men of renunciation." And he added, "We must have the whole education of our country, spiritual and secular, in our hands, and it must be on national lines, through national methods, as far as practicable."[1]

Such were his ideas, which in those days might have appeared too ambitious even to his own countrymen, and too revolutionary to the Government. Yet those ideas were true, and into them the Swāmi breathed life, so that they could not but live to galvanise the country some day or other. The occasion arose in a strange way,

[1] The above quotations are from the *Complete Works*.

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through a national upheaval led by Mahātmā Gāndhi, styled Non-violent Non-co-operation. The movement aimed at paralysing the Government by a process of boycott, invented in the days of the Swadeshi movement of 1905-11, but now reappearing under a new garb. For this weapon the Mahātmā never expressed his obligation to the Swadeshi armoury, which ideologically he shunned as full of violence. Nor did he openly acknowledge his indebtedness to Swāmi Vivekānanda for this assertion of the national will, though to any reader of Indian history it will be apparent that the great Swāmi had anticipated him and laid the foundation of this movement, which was designed to wean the people from their baseless confidence in the impartiality of British justice and the innate goodness of British rule. Only, the Swāmi had done it in his positive way by strengthening the nation's faith in national self-help, whereas the Mahātmā built his hope mainly on the negative tactic of withholding co-operation from the British. In the field of education this resulted in a mass walk-out from the existing educational institutions and attempts at filling up the vacuum by founding new ones on purely national lines. The Swāmis of the Rāmakrishna Order declined to join hands with the politicians, just as they had done earlier during the Swadeshi movement. But they were not slow to discover that the Swāmi and the Mahātmā were presenting merely the obverse and reverse of the same coin. Recognising the inner positive import of the Mahātmā's life and movement, they, as true sons of the motherland, supported him in their own way without actually entering into the political agitation. One of the best compliments paid to the Mahātmā at this time was that of Swāmi Shivānanda, who said in November, 1922, "There is no doubt about it that Mahātmā Gāndhi is really endowed with great powers. It is also true that

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there has been a special manifestation in him of the Primal Energy, the Mother of the Universe. . . . The Mother of the Universe who was awakened by Shri Rāmakrishna for the good of the world is obviously working in various ways through the instrumentality of different persons. Many times in his lectures Swāmi Vivekānanda stated what constitutes India's true well-being. Solutions he proposed for the regeneration of the country twenty-five or thirty years ago—the abolition of untouchability, the elevation of the depressed classes, the spread of education among the masses, and so on—are now being preached by Mahātmā Gāndhi" (*For Seekers of God*, pp. 18-19).

These were the words of the President of the Organisation. And at Benares, Swāmi Turiyānanda, a veritable lion of Vedānta, roared against the inequities of British rule and inspired the young monks to take up the educational programme of the Mahātmā, which was after all the same as that of Swāmi Vivekānanda, when disentangled from all political trappings. His fiery words caught the imagination of many, and most of all of Swāmi Sadbhāvānanda, then Brahmachāri Vidyā-chaitanya, who along with his friend Jnāneshwarā-nanda, planned to start a residential High School. They had no money, their only asset being enthusiasm, the message of Swāmi Vivekānanda and belief in national self-assertion. And to help them with advice on educational matters and with a band of self-sacrificing young men, there was Swāmi Nirvedānanda, Founder-Secretary of the Rāmakrishna Mission Students' Home, Calcutta. Thus the idealism of the one and the executive ability of the other combined to bring into being the Rāma-krishna Mission Vidyāpith, which was first started at Mihijām (now Chittaranjan) in May, 1922, and then shifted in next January to Deoghar, or Baidyanāthdhām, the famous pilgrim town on the Eastern Railway, which

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we have already mentioned in connection with an historic incident during the Master's pilgrimage in the company of Mathur Bābu. Started in a rented house with only three students, the school has now a strength of 212 boys, accommodated in its own houses standing on an extensive plot of land amidst picturesque surroundings. The teachers living with the boys and looking after them are mostly monks of the Order, and the institution is furnished with all the educational requirements—physical, mental, moral and spiritual.

We cite this case as typical of the way in which educational institutions sprang up in the wake of the national upheaval. We mentioned earlier another institution of a similar nature, the residential High School section of the Rāmakrishna Mission Students' Home at Madras, which too had its birth about the same time.

We now turn to another typical institution, the Rāmakrishna Mission Āshrama of Sarishā, which we introduced in the last chapter. Started under similar circumstances as a small centre for medical service and primary education, it soon outgrew its swadling-clothes. The Third General Report of the Mission stated: "The Āshrama conducts a primary school and a charitable dispensary. It opened a weaving institution, which worked eight looms in 1922." The centre has now developed beyond recognition. The dispensary is still there; but the educational activities have eclipsed it. And this was mostly the work of one enthusiastic and energetic monk of clear vision, tender heart and indomitable will, who was ready to suffer privations for a good cause in a remote village, depending solely on private charity. Swāmi Ganeshānanda's boldness was shown at its best when he stood up against all rural prejudices to start a school for girls and arrange for their education on the most modern

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lines, including physical exercise and open-air activities, which were unthinkable for girls of that period, particularly in a rural area. His effort and sacrifice have now raised the centre to a status of which the Mission is justly proud. Its contribution in the field of secondary education for both boys and girls has been readily acknowledged by the public. The only regret is that the Swāmi died prematurely on July 25, 1941.

In distant Malabār, again, at a place called the Vilangans, four miles from Trichur, there sprang up an educational institution mainly for Harijan (depressed class) boys under the painstaking leadership of Swāmi Tyāgishānanda. The Āshrama had really come into existence in 1915 under the name of Vivekodaya Samājam. In 1924 were added a Gurukula or Students' Home and a Vidyāmandira or day school, the number of students on its rolls being 237 in 1930. The institutions were integrated with the Rāmakrishna Math of Belur in 1929. Started as a primary school with accommodation for some boys, the institution struggled on with its high idealism and scant resources. But tenacity and sincerity of purpose overcame all obstacles. Soon an industrial section and a night school were added, and a dispensary catered for the needs of the poor villagers. Gradually the residential section divided itself into two parts—one for boys and the other for girls, and the school too grew in stature till it became a High School. Still later the Āshrama added a library and reading room at Punkunnam, in the town itself. At present the Vilangans institutions are rightly appreciated in Malabār for their high educational attainments and contribution to Harijan uplift.

Thus spread the educational activities of the Math and Mission in the twenties of the present century, as its medical activities had done during the two previous decades. We have cited some cases as illustrative of the

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underlying spirit and the process of growth. The list is by no means complete. From the Fifth General Report of the Mission, published in March, 1929 and covering the years 1925-1927, we learn that there were ten large educational centres—two in Calcutta (Students' Home and Nivedita Girls' School), and one each at Barnagore (orphanage), Sarishā, Sārgāchhi, Jamshedpur, Deoghar, Dacca, Madras and Ceylon, in addition to smaller ones elsewhere. The reader has heard of almost all of them except those at Jamshedpur and in Ceylon. We shall only briefly refer to these, though it is not implied that they are any the less important. In fact, if the volume of work is any test, these two centres can outbid many others.

The Ceylon centre came to be organised under the Mission in 1924 by a process of co-ordination of diverse efforts conducted in different parts of the Island in the same line. Thus, with Colombo as the headquarters, where spiritual work too was carried on, there came to exist two schools in Trincomalie, two in Jaffna and five in Batticaloa, with a total strength of 1,358 students on the rolls of all the institutions by 1927.

The Vivekānanda Society of Jamshedpur, originally started by some employees of the Tata Iron and Steel Company, was recognised by the Mission in 1927. First it was organised mostly as a religious and philanthropic institution. But it is now a big educational centre with several branch schools scattered over the entire city.

We cannot leave this interesting topic without referring to another unostentatious effort in the remote Khāsiā and Jaintiā Hills in Assam by Swāmi Prabhānanda, who died prematurely in 1938, as a result of strain and malnutrition suffered in the cause of benighted humanity in that little known corner of tribal India. Backed by finances from the West and

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the patronage of an alien Government in India, the Christian missionaries not only converted the poor, simple and illiterate people *en masse,* but they also denationalised them in spite of the fact that the Khāsis themselves claimed to belong to the Aryan stock, having been disowned by their forefathers as degraded kshatriyas. In those days of British rule, most of the hill areas in Assam were sealed off from the plains people, while with regard to the other areas, the Hindu population all around looked on helplessly as the foreigners worked havoc among their countrymen. At last in 1924, a band of monks headed by Swāmi Prabhānanda moved up to the Khāsiā Hills to do something, however meagre, by starting educational institutions and making religious influence and philanthropic help available to the tribals. A rude beginning was made at Shellā, forty-five miles below Shillong, headquarters of the Khāsiā Hills and Assam, with a primary school, which had soon to be raised to the standard of a Middle English School, and for which an annual subsidy of Rs. 500 was available from the Khāsiā Chiefs. Other schools also grew up elsewhere in its wake. In 1929 was established a headquarters for all the institutions at Shillong, where Khāsiā boys could be accommodated for higher education. But all this was only a drop in the ocean as compared with the vast organised effort and resources of the missionaries. Still the monks had one asset, the goodwill of the people ; and this small effort succeeded in engendering among the Khāsis a faith in themselves and a spirit of resistance to alien overtures. In a sense the people became spiritually rearmed.

Up till now we have dealt with the bigger educational activities of the Mission. We cannot for obvious reasons enter into a discussion of the smaller ones, notwithstanding the fact that there were quite a number of Math and Mission centres doing educational work

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in their humble way through primary schools, night schools, etc., along with philanthropic activities.

In addition to all the centres mentioned so far, the Fifth General Report of the Mission states that it had in view the affiliation of the centres at Bānkurā, Garbetā, Māldā, Dināǰpur, Mymensingh, Faridpur, Shellā and Singapore, which, in fact, were being conducted by the monks of the Order with the approval and under the guidance of the Belur Headquarters.

Thus at the end of 1927 we have an imposing array of Mission centres in India—no less than 17 permanent branches for philanthropic work, 10 others for educational activity and 8 more of various types in the waiting list, all working under the directions of the headquarters at Belur. With these have to be taken into account the several institutions that each branch centre managed; then only one can realise the magnitude of the total work turned out. Yet this is only one side of the picture. There were 8 more foreign centres. And we have not considered the Math centres in India, of which 14 undertook some sort of philanthropic and educational work in addition to their purely religious activity, while 15 more confined themselves to purely spiritual activity or served as retreats for the monks engaged in diverse fields of service. We need not enter into any detailed account of these Maths, for in this book we are concerned with typical cases showing the process of the evolution of the organisation viewed as a whole, rather than with the individual institutions as such.

By way of indicating the type of work undertaken by the Maths, we referred to preaching, libraries, temples, worship, public celebrations, publication, etc. We must also mention the cultural contribution that the Math centres were making in the fields of art, music and literature, albeit these attempts were funda-

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mentally religious, and there was no conscious effort at demonstration or creation of new forms. Shri Rāmakrishna sang in a heavenly voice and with inspiration. Swāmi Vivekānanda was a gifted musician and a lover of classical songs, which he prescribed for others as a stimulus to moral and spiritual strength. His co-disciples, Swāmis Shivānanda and Sāradānanda, were adepts in this art, and ideologically they were at one with their great leader. In pursuance of this tradition, the followers of the Master and Swāmiji did, and still do, their best to encourage and keep alive the classical songs and tunes, though for the time being these seem to be a little out of court. Rāmprasād, Kamalākānta and other old masters in Bengal, and Surdās, Tulsidās, Tyāgarāja, Mirābāi and others outside Bengal, have their greatest respect and admiration. Even today, the monks sing every evening, during vesper, the praise of Shri Rāmakrishna, composed and set to music by Swāmi Vivekānanda in the time-honoured classical style, and they intone a Sanskrit hymn composed by him to a solemn devotional melody. We have also to note the introduction by Swāmi Brahmānanda of the Sanskrit choral song in praise of Shri Rāma, again in the classical style. The birthday celebrations held annually at the different Math and Mission centres give scope to local talents to demonstrate their mastery of the old songs, and sometimes artistes from the cities are invited to country places to entertain the audience.

In the field of artistic finesse, the Rāmakrishna Movement has not yet consciously adopted any style of its own. Perhaps it is evolving imperceptibly, and history will bear witness to it in another half a century. But even in 1927 one could testify to the artistic sense of the monks as it was revealed by the quality of their book-production, pictures, buildings, woodwork and cotton products. There was a time when their publica-

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tion centres led in setting the standards for others to follow. The pictures and textile fabrics they produced displayed an austerity combined with proportion and symmetry; and their photographic reproductions not only revealed faithfulness to the original, but also delicacy of finish. In recent years their temple architecture seems to be taking a new form.

And now we turn our attention to their literary activities and publications. Naturally, the monks confined themselves mostly to religious subjects, but they did not for that reason overlook literary perfection. Swāmi Vivekānanda was not merely an orator, he was also a poet and a writer of eminence who created a style for others to follow. Besides, he wrote in a charming way about his travel experiences, composed short stories and made a comparative study of social forms. His *Parivrājak, Bhābbār Kathā* and *Prāchya o Pāshchātya,* as also his letters, are literary treats in themselves, while *Vartamān Bhārat* occupies a niche of its own. In all this he was but reproducing the artless art of his Master, whose *Kathāmrita,* or *Gospel,* furnished literary entertainment as well as spiritual instruction, and as such has been regarded as poetry by an eminent Bengali writer, Achintya Kumār Sen Gupta, who delivered a course of lectures on *Kavi Rāmakrishna* (Rāmakrishna the Poet) at the University of Calcutta. Swāmi Vivekānanda was followed by his very able brother-disciples and disciples. Leaving aside their oral teachings, which are full of literary merit, we find that they excelled even in composition. Swāmi Sāradānanda, with his *Lilāprasanga* and other works, was a writer of the first water. Swāmi Abhedānanda earned a lasting name as a writer on philosophical subjects. Swāmi Akhandānanda's memoirs of his early days of travel are highly entertaining. Swāmi Turiyānanda's letters are a treasure in Bengali. Swāmi Vijnānānanda

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wrote on scientific and technical subjects. Swāmi Rāmakrishnānanda was both an astute thinker and writer in English and Bengali. Swāmi Trigunātita left his mark on the pages of the *Udbodhan*. With such a background, the monks of the Order could not but try to express themselves with force and finish. They may not have attained the grace or elegance of Shri Rāmakrishna or Swāmi Vivekānanda ; still their achievement has been quite noteworthy. Swāmi Shuddhānanda won his laurels as the translator of Swāmi Vivekānanda's works into Bengali and as a contributor and Editor of the *Udbodhan,* and Swāmi Prajnānanda as a contributor and editor of the *Udbodhan* and *Prabuddha Bhārata.* The latter's book, *Bhārater Sādhanā,* was once read and appreciated widely for its deep understanding of Indian national problems and its intelligent solution of them on a religious basis. And there was, of course, Sister Niveditā, whose writings, embellished with a fine diction and charm of expression—all charged with a high religious fervour and national sentiment—are an envy to even English writers. Her *Web of Indian Life, The Master as I saw him, Footfalls of Indian History, Cradle Tales of Hinduism* and other books still live not only because of their high literary beauty, but also because of their penetrating interpretation and faithful presentation of the life and art of the Hindus. We need not mention the other writers and Editors of magazines that the quarter century following Vivekānanda produced. Suffice it to say that their literary production as well as merit was quite considerable.

By 1927 the Math centres had developed three full-fledged publication centres, viz., the *Udbodhan* Office, specialising in Bengali books with an admixture of English ; the Advaita Āshrama of Māyāvati with its Calcútta branch, confining itself to English only ; and the Rāmakrishna Math, Madras, selecting English as

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well as Tamil and Telugu for its field of work. There were others too which published a book or two occasionally. As noted earlier, three magazines—the *Udbodhan* in Bengali and *Prabuddha Bhārata* and *The Vedānta Kesari* in English—had come to stay. A fourth in Malayālam, called *Prabuddha Keralam*, started publication from the Rāmakrishna Āshrama, Quilon, Travancore in 1915. It was subsequently transferred to Alleppey, then to Trivandrum and finally to Kalady in the beginning of 1950. In addition to all these, quite a number of books came out in Canarese and Malayālam from the Āshramas at Mysore, Bangalore and Kalady.

From all the facts presented in these pages, the reader must have seen how the monks of the Rāmakrishna Math and Mission were useful members of society in their capacity as social workers. They were also useful as creators of social values. Apart from that, this monastic movement fulfilled a historical necessity. When the scientific outlook on life had been pulverising time-honoured social and religious institutions, the monks of the Order reasserted the primacy of the Indian ideals of renunciation and service on all planes of existence. No wonder that on the purely spiritual side, they stood almost alone, and their Maths got scanty public support, while the Mission flourished. This lack of public appreciation of monasticism was noted even in the First General Report of the Mission (p. 37): "In some quarters at least it is believed that monasticism cannot be any important factor in the growth of the collective life in India. Side by side with such a wrong notion, we find people seeking to utilise the monastic spirit as a means to some material collective end. . . . Briefly speaking, India has its own scheme of life, just as the West has its [own] ; but being under a long spell of self-oblivion, we have been foolishly led captive by

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the Western scheme of life. . . . no material or political end can ever supply the organising motive in the collective life of India. It was this spiritual scheme of collective life out of which the ancient lawgivers of India developed a wonderful structure of society. . . . In India . . . collective life will have to look forward . . . to monasticism, remodelled in outward form, it may be, to suit the requirements of the age." But appreciation or no appreciation, the followers of Shri Rāmakrishna and Swāmiji could be relied on to hold aloft the spiritual banner of India at all times.

It was quite in the fitness of things that they should have done so, for the country was in the throes of a political rebirth. The movement that ultimately threw off the British yoke, had really originated with the starting of the Non-co-operation Movement by Mahātmā Gāndhi, as already remarked. The earlier Swadeshi Movement was effective so far as its objective was concerned ; it virtually stopped with the annulment of the partition of Bengal in 1911. The new struggle was not only more far-reaching in its scope, but also more wide-spread in its appeal to the masses, since it took a religious colouring from the sincerity of purpose of the Mahātmā, his sterling character, his religious sentiments openly avowed and his stress on non-injury and truth as a political weapon. This new outlook helped the Mission to advance its educational activities. But a political ferment is never free from its harmful aspects. To many, the new political upheaval based on the age-old ideals of India—renunciation and service —meant a new religion taught by a new messiah. This confusion of thought created a problem for the Math and Mission, very subtle and yet tremendous in its repercussion, which it is impossible to gauge after the lapse of three or four decades. With its religious association and appeal, silhouetted against a widely felt

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dissatisfaction with the existing political serfdom and aspiration for freedom, the Non-co-operation Movement came as a challenge to the political inactivity of the monks of the Rāmakrishna Order. Moreover, the situation looked perplexing when some monks outside the Order jumped headlong into the movement, thus imparting to it a monastic sanction, as it were. The Mission, as pointed out, accepted some phases of the constructive programme, for instance, the schools, together with the use of looms and spinning wheels as normal courses of education. Various other handicrafts too were accepted for a similar purpose. But such adaptability or active response to environment is one thing, and ideological transmutation is quite a different thing. In adopting the constructive programme, which was a good thing in itself, and which was acknowledged as such by the Mission, there was the risk of being influenced by the political ideology that those outer forms represented. This lurking danger had been discovered much earlier by the Holy Mother, who had suggested the remedy also. It was on October 23, 1911, that the Mother, when passing through Koālpārā, installed the Master's picture on an altar in the Āshrama for daily worship. She had told the head earlier, "Listen, my boy ; as you have built a house for the Master and set up a resting place for us, I shall install the Master there when I pass through it this time. . . . What will you gain by the Swadeshi Movement alone? The Master is the spring of all that we do or have ; he is the ideal. Whatever you do, if you hold on to him, you will never go wrong." The Āshrama was the hotbed of agitation for Swadeshi, with looms, spinning wheels, political discussions, and what not. The Mother's remedy soon set things in their proper perspective. She did not discard the looms or spinning wheels, rather she showed a keen interest in them, saying that as a child she had

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worked a wheel and still felt like doing so. But the angle of vision had to be changed: The Master was to be the centre of everything.

That was in 1911. But movements, though basically old, appear to be new under changed circumstances, and they have to be tackled afresh every time. When, during the heyday of the Non-co-operation Movement, a few over-zealous monks of the Order thought, theoretically at least, that it was their duty to hawk Khaddar, or hand-spun cotton cloth, from door to door, this only underlined the deep-seated vacillation in other minds, though only one or two of them actually did hawk the cloth on the streets, and that merely as a gesture, for one single day. More serious, however, was the attitude of some political leaders who, being offended at the unbecoming behaviour of the Mohant, or head of the temple of Shiva at Tārakeshwar, launched a Satyāgraha, or non-violent civil resistance, to remove him from office. It became an all-Bengal movement, in which the leaders wanted the Belur Math monks to take an active part. On being met with rebuff, they became antagonised, and some of them started a smear-campaign against the Math, carried on surreptitiously from mouth to mouth. But the organisation survived.

Such occasions for clashes were plentiful. In the middle of 1921, there was a movement among the tea-estate labourers in Assam to get redress from the oppression of the foreign managers. As a protest, and at the suggestion of some political leaders, the labourers began to quit the gardens in a body and mass at Chāndpur, a steamer and railway station in East Bengal, and other places, creating thereby serious problems of food, transport, health, etc. As a result, the Mission had to start relief work at the key points. But there were a few politicians who wanted this to be geared fully to politics. Being questioned on this subject by

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a field worker, Swāmi Sāradānanda wrote back on June 7, 1921, "You have gone there to serve God in the poor. Do whatever is needed, and follow whatever method is required, for the fulfilment of that purpose. You have not gone for politics, nor did we send you for that."

In fairness it must be said, however, that though some political thinkers seemed at times to be mistaken in their understanding of the attitude of the Math, there was no confusion in the mind of Mahātmā Gāndhi himself. While on a visit to the Belur Math during the birthday celebration of Swāmi Vivekānanda on Sunday, February 6, 1921, with Pandit Motilāl Nehru, Mr. Mohammed Āli and some other notable coadjutors, he was requested by the people who had gathered there on the occasion to say something. The Mahātmā quietly walked to the upper verandah of the monastery overlooking the Ganges, and addressing the people on the lawn below, said in substance that he had not come there to preach either Non-co-operation or the spinning wheel, but that he had come that day to pay his respects and homage to the sacred memory of Swāmi Vivekānanda on the occasion of his birthday celebration; that he had carefully read the works of the Swāmi, as a result of which his love for the country had become intensified; and that his request to the young men was that they should not leave that day without imbibing some inspiration from the place where Swāmi Vivekānanda had lived and breathed his last (*Mahāpurush Shivānanda,* p. 212). The Mahātmā also saw everything reverentially. The things used by Shri Rāmakrishna as well as his handwriting attracted him very much. The other great leaders too displayed interest in the monastery and its activities, and did not ask what part it was playing in politics. For even a total war need not harness all institutions to its immediate needs.

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Against this setting, the reader can now follow the conversations with the two great Swāmis at the time of which we are speaking. A devotee, much perturbed in mind, approached Swāmi Shivānanda in November, 1922, and said, "Revered sir, at this hour, the whole country is stirred to its very depths by the Non-co-operation Movement of Mahātmā Gāndhi. Countless men and women are rotting in jails. . . . But why is the Rāmakrishna Mission silent in this immense country-wide upheaval? Have not you any contribution to make? . . ." The Swāmi replied in part, "It was to spread his pure spiritual thought that Shri Rāmakrishna brought with him as his assistant such a powerful soul as Swāmi Vivekānanda. Swāmiji could certainly have stirred the country to a political revolution, had he chosen so. Who is more patriotic than he was? How many hearts bleed for the downtrodden masses as his did? Swāmiji did not start a revolution. Had he known it would really help India, he would surely have done so. . . . Though we may not voice our ideas and sentiments loudly in newspaper articles, we are actually accomplishing things, not through politics but in our own way. Mahātmāji is working out similar ideas through politics" (*For Seekers of God,* pp. 15-17, 19).

In 1923 Swāmi Purnānanda pointed out to Swāmi Sāradānanda that a section of the public was opposed to the secluded monastic life, and that it was being openly preached that to be engaged in meditation etc. was sheer waste of time. Without directly repudiating such a theory, the Swāmi replied, "Those who want to instil activism into a nation that is prone to inactivity, are no doubt well-wishers of the country. I never read the opinions of those whom you quote. But if what you say be their opinion, then I ask them, 'How can you keep your ideal alive unless you take the help of meditation and Japa (repetition of the Lord's

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name)?' . . . The country suffers because it has lost the ideal. . . . Meditation, Japa and search for the soul must proceed in the midst of all activity."

After assuming the Presidentship of the Mission, Swāmi Shivānanda undertook long tours in the north and south to spread the message of his Master, which aimed at nothing but the spiritual reconstruction of the country; and as he moved about, groups of devotees formed at each place, adding strength to the old centres, or starting new ones, or giving concrete shape to incipient ones. Thus, in 1924 the stage was set for the establishment of an Āshrama at Ootacamund. On December 12, 1924, he opened the Residential High School building of the Rāmakrishna Mission Students' Home, Madras. On February 6, 1925, he laid the foundation of the Āshrama at Bombay on a plot of land purchased during his stay there, and on February 16, that of the Āshrama at Nāgpur. On January 28, 1925, he dedicated the buildings of the Rāmakrishna Mission Vidyāpath, Deoghar, on its own land. On September 26, 1926, he opened the Āshrama building at Ootacamund; on December 10, he laid the foundation of the Rāmakrishna Industrial School at Nattarampalli; and on December 26, he installed Shri Rāmakrishna at the Bombay Āshrama.

In between, two important developments took place in Bengal. A temple in memory of Swāmi Vivekānanda, begun many years ago on the river at Belur, was completed in 1923 and consecrated on January 28, 1924, the sixty-second birthday of Swāmiji; and another temple, in memory of Swāmi Brahmānanda, was dedicated there on February 7, 1924, on the Swāmi's birthday.

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A NEW ORDER IN TRAVAIL

(1926—1930)

Tennyson, in his *Passing of Arthur,* put the following words in the mouth of Sir Bedivere:

> Old order changeth yielding place to new,
> And God fulfils Himself in many ways,
> Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

Whatever aptness that theory may have in other fields of life, it is absolutely out of place in the history of a religious order, where continuance of policy and tradition is more desirable, and violent change is ruled out of court. The approach here is more akin to that of Thomas Jefferson when presenting his credentials as the Ambassador of the United States of America in the French capital. Being told by the French Premier, "I see you have come to replace Benjamin Franklin," Jefferson corrected him, "I have come to succeed him, and not to replace him. Nobody can replace him." Still changes are inevitable. So the question is: should they come naturally or through violence? But violence in a religious order means a negation of its ideals.

People living near about Swāmi Sāradānanda were almost physically aware that after the Holy Mother had left the world in 1920, he gradually became more and more indrawn. He attended to duty as a matter of routine, but devoted more and more time to spiritual pursuits. One heart's desire of his, to build a temple at Jayrāmbāti, remained unfulfilled, and this he set himself to accomplish with vigour. On his own responsibility he started the structure on the Holy Mother's

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birth-place; and the Mother was installed there on April 19, 1923, amidst great rejoicing. The Swāmi personally attended to all the details of the ceremony, and in a spirit of compassionate liberality, characteristic of the Holy Mother, he unquestioningly initiated many on that day either as his disciples or as Brahmachārins and Sannyāsins of the Rāmakrishna Order. That was a red-letter day in the Swāmi's life, as it was also in the history of the Rāmakrishna Math. Sister Niveditā had declared that the Holy Mother was the last word of Shri Rāmakrishna about Indian womanhood, and here were the monks of the Order paying their heartfelt homage not only to the greatest woman of the age, but also to a perfect manifestation of the Divine Mother on the human plane, now enshrined in her own temple to inspire and uplift generations of her children still in the womb of futurity.

The year 1924 saw the passing away of Jogin Mā on June 4, and Golāp Mā on December 19. Both of them were disciples of the Master and constant companions of the Holy Mother. As such, they were very familiar figures at the *Udbodhan* house and commanded the respect of all the monks. In fact, Golāp Mā in her closing days was the guardian angel of the monastery, looking after the needs of all who resided there. These two losses were felt by everybody, and particularly by Swāmi Sāradānanda. He himself was now in shattered health; the physical weakness of old age, with complicated ailments, was in evidence. He would openly say that his work was finished, and that it was time for others to step in. People around him felt that he was preparing to leave. Just at this juncture he was called upon to make his last contribution to the welfare of the organisation. This was nothing less than to take the initiative in formally transferring the responsibility of management to the younger generation. In fact,

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the Swāmi had been making all necessary preparations for this consummation. During the closing years of his life, he spent many months outside Calcutta, and even while in Calcutta, he avoided becoming involved in details, asking younger people to decide and act upon them. Many younger monks had been elected as Trustees, and Swāmi Shuddhānanda and others were being trained up in administrative work. To some extent, the transfer was proceeding smoothly. At this time an idea began to gain currency that, in order to determine the broad outlines of the future policy and to take stock of the past, a Convention should be called at the Belur Math. The aim of this Convention was to sound opinion, not to pass legislative resolutions.

The Report of the Rāmakrishna Math and Mission Convention sets forth the idea behind the calling of the Convention thus: "With the lapse of this brief but eventful space of forty years, the activities of the movement had grown so complex and multifarious that many among the members, both lay and monastic, felt the necessity of an occasion for all to meet together to take stock of the situation, to compare notes with each other and to lay down broad principles for future guidance" (p. 3). The idea developed, and the Report proceeds to say, "This feeling found a formal and definite expression at the Extraordinary General Meeting of the Rāmakrishna Mission, held on the 2nd June, 1925. It was at this meeting that the idea of a Convention of all members and workers of the Math and Mission was first proposed. The members present, one and all, enthusiastically greeted the proposal as affording them an opportunity to exchange ideas, consolidate their faith in the ideal and infuse new vigour into its practice, and further to strengthen the tie of fellowship and co-operation amongst themselves" (pp. 3-4).

There were other ancillary problems which

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demanded solution, and which the younger generation, left to itself without the backing of the seniors, might not feel quite competent to tackle adequately. A number of Rāmakrishna and Vivekānanda centres had grown up independently or in co-operation with the monks. These continued to be outside the Math and Mission proper, while enjoying all the public confidence and patronage that such an anomalous position could confer. Some of them, with better co-ordination and integration might prove a support to the central organisation at Belur. Further, the ideas and ideals that were being worked out were often misunderstood; they had to be fully reasserted and the ideal of service held up in all its pristine purity freed from extraneous accretions. And above all, there was need of meeting in a spirit of *camaraderie* to intensify mutual love and esteem, which are the soul of any co-operative work.

It is difficult at this distance of time to credit any single individual with the origination of the idea of the Convention. But it was a masterful idea that caught the imagination of Swāmi Shuddhānanda, noted always for his progressive and constitutional outlook. He sat to work to make the idea a reality; and as the Report of the Convention records, "It was solely through the unbounded enthusiasm and the unremitting labours of Swāmi Shuddhānanda that the idea of the Convention materialised." The Swāmi became the Secretary of the Reception Committee. Hence the real burden of the work naturally fell on him. The monks in general took up the idea with zest, though few at that stage fully realised its implications. To them it was to be something like the grand Conventions of the Buddhist age. Few foresaw then that the democratic appeal and approach made through such a move might lead in any direction, unless the representatives could be kept within bounds. The Convention had this bad side as

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well as its good. But the authorities resolved to face both. Perhaps such boldness is necessary in the transitional period of an organisation.

Swāmi Shuddhānanda and his colleagues, however, had their rivals. In a history it may not be quite pertinent to probe into what happens out of doors or behind the screen; it is better perhaps to confine one's attention to the council chamber. In the history of the Rāmakrishna Movement in particular, this will appear to be the wisest course. But unless the reader pricks his ears for a while to catch what others say in the lobbies, he cannot intelligently follow the course of events that we shall depict in the following pages. To be brutally frank, that is the most sorrowful chapter in the whole history, and one hangs one's head in shame to think that any members of a religious order, negligible though they were in numbers, could stoop so low. Yet pleasant or unpleasant, facts cannot be ignored; and if they are to be understood against their proper background, one cannot but leave the beaten track now and then.

We have it from the pen of Swāmi Bhumānanda, an outstanding relief organiser of the Mission who later took up the role of a militant reformer, and whom we shall meet again, that what agitated his mind on the eve of the Convention was the administrative machinery that would be set up. Who were the people to run it and how—that was the only question that mattered. He writes in his Bengali work, *Swāmi Sāradānanda as I saw him,* published in 1929, that he said to the Swāmi, "The older monks are all about to pass away. They themselves cannot work, nor do they want to send others out for work; they like to live all together. As a result, there is dearth of workers in the branch centres of the Math and Mission, so that the work cannot progress. Therefore I believe that if

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monks between the ages of 35 and 45 become Trustees to conduct the Math and Mission, the work will be carried on with amity and efficiency." In order to remedy the prevailing state of things and to pave the way for the coming of the younger Trustees to power, he suggested that Swāmi Sāradānanda should resign as a gesture, though Swāmi Bhumānanda himself believed that the Swāmi still possessed infinite capacity for work. Said he, "I ask you to resign in order to lead the way. The truth is, Sudhir Mahārāj (Swāmi Shuddhānanda), Gangādhar Mahārāj (Swāmi Akhandānanda), Subodh Mahārāj (Swāmi Subodhānanda) and many others have not the capacity for work which you still have. They are in responsible posts; but when duty calls, they stay away. Will not the work be run much better if these retire and are replaced by men of character, trust and executive capacity?" (pp. 409-11). That was the hidden side of the picture. Notwithstanding Swāmi Bhumānanda's impression that Swāmi Sāradānanda sympathised with this idea, we cannot accept this surmise at its face value; for from his own evidence we have it that when a report of a certain relief work appeared in the press without Swāmi Sāradānanda's knowledge, the Swāmi became offended; but when it was represented that much time was unnecessarily wasted if one had to run from the Relief office at the Belur Math to Swāmi Sāradānanda at the *Udbodhan* Office to get his approval, and that this slowed down the work, the latter sent word: "If Sudhir (Shuddhānanda) edits this, I shall have no objection." Swāmi Sāradānanda had such confidence in Swāmi Shuddhānanda, whom he himself had trained and who had sat at the feet of Swāmi Vivekānanda to learn his first lessons in monastic life!

Whatever Swāmi Bhumānanda, or people of his way of thinking, might have fancied the objective of

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the Convention to be, so far as the conveners were concerned, the purely administrative questions did not seem to be uppermost in their minds, despite the fact that organisational questions of a general character were not ruled out. Yet administrative problems did crop up now and again, as they naturally had to. A sub-committee formed by the annual General Meeting of the Mission in 1925 "decided to limit the scope of the Convention to those institutions only which do as a rule bear the names of Shri Rāmakrishna and Swāmi Vivekānanda and are more or less in touch with the Central Math and Mission" (*ibid.*, p. 4). The Convention opened on April 1 and continued till April 8, 1926. Over one hundred institutions were represented in it, and the number of representatives and guests was nearly three hundred and fifty.

The address of welcome was read by Swāmi Sāradānanda, who was the Chairman of the Reception Committee. It was in essence an elaboration of the well-known idea of Swāmi Vivekānanda: Every enterprise has to pass through three stages—ridicule, opposition and then acceptance. Only he named the stages as opposition, indifference and acceptance. He traced the history of the organisation to show that it had passed through the two earlier stages of opposition and indifference, and was then in the third stage of appreciation, which, according to him, was the most delicate period in the life of any new movement; for public approval might imperceptibly rob it of its vitality or deflect it from its chosen path. "The present Convention," he said, ". . . affords you the rare privilege of meeting many of your senior co-workers and elders together to profit by their experience, of discussing and settling future plans of work with them for the welfare of the Mission as a whole, and for warding off the dangers and evils that threaten

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to overtake all institutions at this critical stage of their acceptance by the public." And he concluded: "Friends, brethren, children, co-labourers in the vineyard of Shri Rāmakrishna, I welcome you with all my heart in the name of our hallowed Master, our illustrious leader, the Swāmi Vivekānanda, and our late revered President, the best beloved of the Master, the Swāmi Brahmānanda."

The Convention heard with rapt attention the solemn speech delivered with all seriousness on the lawn east of the present Shri Rāmakrishna temple. Then the equally elevating and thought-provoking speech of Swāmi Shivānanda, President of the Convention, was read. In the subsequent sessions, speeches were delivered and papers read on the ideas and ideals of the Mission and allied subjects. On the sixth day some resolutions were passed, which deserve quotation almost in full as revealing the stage of evolution the organisation had reached, and the way along which the members wanted to lead it. The Resolutions were:

1. In view of the fact that the country stands greatly in need of the right type of education, this meeting of the representatives suggests that the Mission should give greater attention to educational work than has been done in the past, and should formulate a definite scheme for the guidance of the educational activities of the Mission.

2. This meeting . . . suggests that in the expansion of the work of both the Math and Mission, proper attention be paid to the real spirit of Karma-Yoga.

3. . . . that the authorities may permit the opening of new centres only if competent workers be available, and if the report by an authorised member of the Order about the local needs and conditions be favourable.

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4. . . . that members of the Order authorised by the Committee of Trustees or the Governing Body be sent at least once a year to inspect the general procedure of the work of the branch centres, both Math and Mission, with power to look into the accounts. Expenses are to be borne in part by the centres concerned.

5. In view of the fact that the dissemination of the principles of religion as interpreted by Shri Rāmakrishna and Swāmi Vivekānanda among all classes of people is one of the main working ideals of the Order, this meeting of the representatives suggests:

(*a*) That proper steps be taken for the training of preachers, who should have a general knowledge of our Shāstras in the original, and that of one of the principal provincial languages as far as possible.

(*b*) That efforts be made by the President and one or more members of the branch centres to learn the local vernaculars also.

6. In order to develop a spirit of co-operation and co-ordination among the workers of the three existing departments of the Rāmakrishna Order, viz., preaching and publication, education, and philanthropy, this meeting . . . suggests the holding of departmental conferences at least once in three years.

7. For the efficient management of the Math and Mission, this meeting . . . suggests:

(*a*) That except under special circumstances, the monastic heads and workers of the centres of the Order be transferred from one centre to another, or relieved at least every six years and four years respectively, by the Committee of Trustees or the Governing Body. It further suggests that the heads of the branch centres concerned should be consulted before transferring or relieving workers.

(*b*) That no local monastic worker should be

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the head of a particular centre except under special circumstances.

8. In view of the fact that much confusion arises with regard to the division of duties between the Chief Supervisor and the Secretary of the Local Committee of the Mission branch centres, this meeting of the representatives suggests that the functions of the Chief Supervisor be defined and incorporated in the Bye-laws of the Memorandum of Association of the Rāmakrishna Mission.

9. In view of the fact that the want of a sufficient number of trained workers in the different departments of the Mission is being keenly felt, this meeting of the representatives suggests that arrangements be made at a suitable place for a general and special training of available workers according to Swāmiji's Math Rules. Further, that special stress be laid on a similar type of training at all centres of the Math and Mission.

A few points with regard to these resolutions require a little elucidation. We said that the Convention was not meant to solve any specific problem of the Rāmakrishna Math and Mission, since it was attended by quite a number of representatives from non-affiliated and unrecognised centres who were not expected to consider the administrative problems of the Math and Mission centres. Besides, even the representatives of the latter did not come with any considered programme; they had no clear idea as to what they would be called upon to do at Belur. Yet when people of active temperament congregate anywhere, they tend to chalk out some scheme of work. So when the Math and Mission representatives met privately and compared notes, the administrative problems naturally came to the surface, and ultimately found expression and some sort of solution in the Convention itself. The speeches dealing with the ideas and ideals of the Math and

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Mission were excellent and instructive; but problems of the Math and Mission were too pressing to be ignored. To most of the monastic representatives coming from outside Belur and Calcutta, the question of the relationship between the parent institution and the unrecognised ones was not a live issue; this could be left to the Belur authorities to determine in the light of some general advice about acceptance of fresh responsibility. The resolutions, therefore, say nothing directly about any of the unrecognised centres. Not only that, the lay representatives of the unaffiliated centres sensed the general feeling of the Convention and avoided getting mixed up with the constitutional deliberations. They had simply to content themselves with the assurance that the door was still open for their admission, though under a stricter scrutiny.

As for the resolutions themselves, while they represented real problems and aspirations, they had no constitutional sanction, and so amounted to mere "suggestions." They were also accepted as such, for though good in themselves, many of them could not be put into practice immediately. At the concluding session on April 7, Swāmi Sāradānanda, while accepting the resolutions in principle, hinted that their implementation could not, in the very nature of things, be the sole duty of the Trustees. A democratic and practical approach required that the framers themselves should also share the responsibility, and that to a large extent. "The one thing," said the Swāmi, "that I now want to impress upon you is that you should think and think over the resolutions you passed yesterday and should try, every one of you, faithfully to give effect to them, when you are all back at your respective centres of activity." He added, "This Convention, you should further remember, is by no means the last one." But such a Convention has not been held again up till now

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(1957), for in the interval has been evolved what is called the Monks' Conference, which for practical purposes has overshadowed the Convention idea. But while making such a negative evaluation of the resolutions, the reader must not suppose that the needs felt and expressed by so many monks could remain ineffective; and we shall see that the underlying ideas gave birth to constitutional changes and new rules and regulations in the years that followed. And what were these fundamental ideas? The resolutions drew attention to the need of accentuating the educational activities, keeping intact the ideal of Karma-Yoga, exercising caution in opening new centres, keeping greater watch over the branch centres, identifying the work with the local culture, guarding against attachment to particular centres, and training of monastic workers. Most of these resolutions need no explanation so far as this history is concerned. We shall add a few words only about the third and seventh resolutions.

The Math and Mission spread mainly as a result of personal effort and initiative. Almost all the centres in the initial stages grew out of wants felt and co-operation extended by the people of the locality—no matter whether it was a province, a district, or even a village. Though the underlying ideas were the same everywhere, there was no central planning, and this led to a concentration of centres in some regions, while other areas remained untouched. The remedy was not easy; for the Belur authorities had no central fund and had perforce to rely on local enthusiasm and co-operation. And this local enthusiasm—so valuable in the early stages—created difficulties later. The inaugurators tended to become narrow and self-satisfied in their outlook, and their personal lives became too much influenced by the tastes and opinions of local friends.

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As a result, they were unwilling to allow any freedom of action or to agree to any improvements suggested either by the Math and Mission authorities or by the workers deputed by them. We faced such a situation at Benares in 1921. Some other places also told the same tale. It was altogether a complex problem. Nobody would suggest outright that the older people ought to be replaced; that would be outrageous, for to discredit the genuinely self-sacrificing workers on whose life-blood those institutions sprouted and thrived, would be cutting at the very roots of the organisation. At the same time, the followers of Swāmi Vivekānanda could not reconcile themselves for all time to outmoded methods of work. This is just illustrative of the difficulties that the authorities would have become involved in if they had accepted the resolutions as they were for immediate execution. They could only be accepted in principle, to be given effect to by stages and at the proper time. This is exactly what was done by the Trustees of the Belur Math, who in another capacity are also the Governing Body of the Rāmakrishna Mission. They "adopted" the resolutions, with only one real modification, viz., that in Resolution 7 the limits of six and four years for the heads and the workers were raised to eight and five years respectively.

The Convention was over. But Swāmi Sāradānanda had one more task to perform; and this came as a surprise to many, for it amounted practically to handing over the executive work of the Math and Mission to a band of younger monks who had proved their worth in various fields and were accordingly expected to be honoured and obeyed by others. We refer to the formation of the Working Committee. The idea originated with some of the younger monks who saw that the organisation had expanded enormously and needed regular careful attention from an active

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group of responsible workers of varied capacities stationed at the headquarters. They suggested the formation of a subordinate body at Belur, with its definite rules of procedure, to look after the multifarious problems of the whole organisation as they arose. This would serve a double purpose: not only would it lighten the burden of the Trustees and the Governing Body, but it would at the same time give wholesome training in the art of administration. It was the whole-hearted support of Swāmi Sāradānanda that brought this desire of the younger group to fruition. On March 30, 1926, the Trustees of the Belur Math authorised twelve monks of the Order "to draw a draft scheme of a Working Committee of the Math and Mission by considering the suggestions offered by different centres invited at the Convention." This draft scheme was first submitted to the President, and then unanimously accepted by the Trustees on April 8, 1926. In brief the scheme was as follows:

There would be a Working Committee of twelve members, including a Secretary, to assist the Trustees and the Governing Body of the Rāmakrishna Math and Mission in discharging their duties. The term would be for two years. The Committee would have at least two meetings a month, each to elect its own chairman. Seven members would form a quorum, and decisions would be taken by a majority of votes. At least seven of the members would have to stay at the Belur Math, and no member could absent himself from more than eight meetings within two years. For convenience, the Committee was authorised to decide finally, by at least seven votes in favour, all matters relating to: (1) determining the lines of activity according to the general policy of the Order, (2) guiding the financial policy of the different centres for their mutual benefit, (3) training of workers according to Swāmiji's Math Rules,

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(4) admission of members into the Order and posting of heads and workers, (5) management of the work at the headquarters, and (6) supervision and guidance of work at the branches. To expedite its work, the President or the Secretary of the Order was to attend to all references made by it. The first Committee was composed of Swāmi Virajānanda as Secretary, and Swāmis Dhirānanda, Amriteshwarānanda, Ātmaprakāshānanda, Prabodhānanda, Ātmabodhānanda, Nirvānānanda, Kālikānanda, Nirvedānanda, Jnāneshwarānanda, Omkārānanda and Brahmachāri Ganendra Nāth as members.

Of these, the first three were Trustees; the rest were talented monks working at Belur or in Calcutta, except Swāmis Jnāneshwarānanda and Kālikānanda, who were called to the headquarters from their fields of work in Patnā and Benares. Swāmi Virajānanda was chosen as Secretary for his great seniority and efficiency as also for the suavity of his temper and his detached outlook, he having lived in solitude for a long time on the Himalayan heights at Shyāmalā Tāl. For his past career he commanded everybody's respect.

After the Math and Mission authorities had placed their seal of approval on the scheme of the Working Committee, Swāmi Sāradānanda called an informal meeting of the monks at the Belur Math to apprise them of this. Swāmi Shivānanda and other senior monks too sat there to associate themselves openly with what Swāmi Sāradānanda recommended. Swāmi Shivānanda was in full agreement with Swāmi Sāradānanda's views in this matter. In fact, shortly after the formation of the Working Committee, the two Swāmis issued a joint manifesto to all the centres, stating that thenceforward all business communications should in the first instance be addressed to the Secretary of that Committee. It was

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very much the same with the other senior Swāmis as well; they worked in unison as a team.

This, however, was not the case with a few younger monks. They raised the objection that the Trustees and the Governing Body had no right to delegate their authority to another body, and so on. In order to partially silence these hypercritics, the Belur authorities, while appointing the Committee for the second term of two years in April, 1928, introduced some major changes in its constitution. In place of a different Secretary at the head of it, they made their own President and Secretary hold the same portfolios in the Working Committee as well. Of course, the Committee invariably had a few more Trustees as its regular members. Finally, in 1938, all the Trustees were made its ex-officio members; the President was given the power to veto any of its decisions; and it was expressly declared that the rules of the Working Committee should not be construed as delegating any of the powers vested in the Trustees and the Governing Body as such. But by the end of the first two years, the Committee had become an eyesore to the malcontents.

Occasions for open clash were averted through Swāmi Sāradānanda's foresight. For instance, some of his disciples wanted to celebrate his birthdays at the *Udbodhan* Office. But some senior monks at Belur felt that this would sow the seeds of future trouble by encouraging fissiparous tendencies. They naturally wanted to make the Belur Math the centre of attraction for all followers of Shri Rāmakrishna, no matter whom they accepted as their guru. It grieved them to think that behind Swāmi Sāradānanda's back some people should try to form a sort of cult round him and the *Udbodhan* Office. The reader should know that Swāmi Sāradānanda lived and had his Secretarial office there. This gave an occasion to a few petty-minded

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persons living in or frequenting that place to assume an air of greatness by virtue of their close association with the great Swāmi. They looked down upon their equals at the Belur Math, and thought of the *Udbodhan* Office as a sort of rival to the parent Math. Instinctively Swāmi Sāradānanda directed his disciples to hold the celebration at the Belur Math. But some people took umbrage. Petty incidents like this multiplied, till there was a combination of the disgruntled elements leading to an explosion, with which we shall presently deal.

Swāmi Sāradānanda's health had been declining at the same time that he kept on increasing his hours of meditation, against medical advice, till on the evening of August 6, 1927, he suddenly had a stroke and lay in his bed motionless and outwardly unconscious. At once telephones rang, and telegraph wires buzzed to bring the monks and devotees from all corners of India to have a last look at the departing saint. The Swāmi had lost his power of speech, but love and wisdom still beamed through his eyes; and thus on August 18 he breathed his last. His body was carried to the Belur Math and cremated on the brink of the Ganges at the spot where nine years ago the body of Swāmi Premānanda had been consigned to the fire.

It was a terrible shock to all the devotees of Shri Rāmakrishna, and most of all to Swāmi Shivānanda, who depended so much on him. And now he was almost the last remnant of a passing generation—himself much advanced in age, weak in health and without any companion with whom he could have heart to heart talks and from whom he could take advice. Among the other surviving brother-disciples, Swāmi Abhedānanda was out of touch with the main current of the movement; Swāmis Akhandānanda and Vijnānānanda lived permanently outside, visiting the Belur Math only occa-

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sionally. They were much younger than he; and still younger in general attitude and behaviour, though not in age, was Swāmi Subodhānanda, affectionately called by his brothers Khokā, the little one, who lived in the Math itself. Swāmi Shivānanda's feelings at that time are perhaps best expressed in the words of the familiar English poem:

I feel like one who treads alone
Some banquet hall deserted,
Whose lights are fled, whose garlands dead,
And all but him departed.

The Swāmi himself spoke of them thus: "Sharat Mahārāj's passing away paralysed my right side, as it were; the mind became altogether vacant. I too got ready to depart at that very time. As soon as Sharat Mahārāj left, my health too deteriorated greatly, and the mind became wholly indifferent to work. I prayed to the Master that I might not continue longer. But he did not listen, he held me back by force. And that is why I am still here. He knows best why he did not allow me to go. Everything is in his hands. I shall have to stay on as long as it pleases him."

Indeed, the immediate reaction of this great loss on Mahāpurush Mahārāj (Swāmi Shivānanda) was that he fell seriously ill, and at times his life seemed to be hanging by a thread. After recovery he went for a change to Madhupur, and then to Benares. At Benares many monks, devotees and friends met him off and on and profited by his presence and instruction. Among these occasional visitors were Shri Jawāharlāl Nehru and his wife Kamalā Nehru, who later met the Swāmi again. The latter, in particular, was very much devoted to the Swāmi. A pleasant function during the sojourn was the initiaion of some young men into Sannyāsa and Brahmacharya on the birthday of Swāmi Vivekānanda.

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The Swāmi returned to the Belur Math on February 19, 1928, halting at Patnā on the way for three days.

Back at the Belur Math, Mahāpurushji, now about seventy-three years in age, was all sweetness to everybody, initiating numerous people into discipleship and leading them along the path of spirituality. He now talked almost always of the Master, the Holy Mother and Swāmi Vivekānanda. And as Swāmi Vijnānānanda wrote in 1937, "In fact, Mahāpurush Mahārāj merged himself so thoroughly in the Master that he ceased to have any separate identity. Those whom he blessed were really blessed by the Master, and his instructions are those of the Master himself." But the Swāmi himself was all humility. Should any hint be dropped of his greatness, he would turn to the picture of Shri Rāmakrishna with folded hands and say, "Lord, Lord, it is well known to you. . . . I have no learning, no intelligence, no power. You have seated me, and so I am here." His talks were always tuned to the highest verities of life. If anybody requested him to reprove any one, he would say, "A man is not corrected merely through instruction and chiding. If you can, change the current of his mind through your spiritual power. . . . If anybody is to be rectified, pray for him intensely to the Master and beseech him. If he is graciously disposed, the course of a man's mind can be changed in the twinkling of an eye." To younger monks he would say, "You are our successors. It is you who will have to do everything in future. How long can our bodies last? So prepare yourselves for all the different kinds of work; now it is your turn." The Swāmi was the living example of a free soul held back at divine behest for the good of the world.

There was goodness, there was spiritual life. But so bad is the world that even such innocence has to suffer mental agonies! And that was Swāmi Shivā-

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nanda's lot. We hinted a little while ago that the stage was being set for an explosion; it waited only for a spark. The danger spot was the *Udbodhan* Office, and there it started. To be outspoken, we have to say that even the innocence of a saint can be exploited by self-seekers whose conscience has become blunted, or it can be set at nought by shrewd men of the world determined to fight against evil at its own level. On one side was unarmed spirituality, and on the other side armed machination, bent on having its way by hook or by crook. And to add to this, the atmosphere prevailing generally at the *Udbodhan* Office was far from congenial to balanced thinking or judgment. We noted a sort of estrangement even while Swāmi Sāradānanda lived; the gulf widened after his loving and controlling hand was gone. The trouble arose partly because of temperamental maladjustment. There were certain monastic members within the organisation who, while possessing faith and capacity to work like demons, were too impetuous, indisciplined and egotistic to be easily assimilated in the general *milieu* of the Math and Mission, and required special guidance. They were naturally avoided by most of the branch centres. Even the Belur Headquarters, under the management of so loving a soul as Swāmi Premānanda, found it impossible to keep them under proper control. These automatically gravitated towards the *Udbodhan* Office, where the paternal care, courteous behaviour, tolerance for all sorts of vagaries, and penetrating vigilance of Swāmi Sāradānanda kept them contented and within bounds. We alluded also to a sort of cult growing at the *Udbodhan* Office, in opposition to the ideas prevailing at Belur. To this psychological preparedness, the differences on administrative points already referred to added the spark, and in this Brahmachāri Ganendra Nāth played the leading part.

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Ganendra Nāth had had a romantic career. He was a brahmin by birth, named Ganendra Nāth Banerjee, but when he joined the Order rather young, he had not much wealth, education or culture to renounce or boast of. He had, however, one asset—he was extraordinarily intelligent and resourceful, so that he could penetrate into the core of a problem, plan for its solution and execute it with boldness and efficiency. From his association with great personalities he acquired an external finish and sense of decorum that easily impressed the higher circles of society. He accompanied Sister Niveditā and others in their travels to the historical sites of art and architecture ; and through the awakening of a dormant talent, he became a sort of artist and art connoisseur. His aesthetic sense found expression in the beautiful get-up of the *Udbodhan* Office publications, and the artistic design of the Niveditā Girls' School ; and by his advice and guidance many of the Calcutta presses benefited greatly. Gradually he ingratiated himself into the confidence of some of the big people of Calcutta, and with some monks in the Order he became a favourite. His help was sought at times of difficulty, and he seldom failed in such emergencies. But with the passage of time he appeared to be too vain to his equals ; and to the younger monks he was a terror and a mystery. They knew that he had to be obeyed ; and yet they could not understand why a man who had not put on the Sannyāsin's garb, and not even a Brahmachārin's (for he dressed himself like an ordinary gentleman), should yet occupy some of the highest positions of command, while he talked disparagingly of his equals and even seniors. It was a mystery why this man should demand the fullest respect from the junior monks. And strange was his behaviour at certain times. The present writer remembers an occasion when during a birthday celebra-

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tion of Shri Rāmakrishna at the Belur Math, he was on duty at the foot of the stairs leading up to the old shrine. Next to him was the room from which Prasāda (consecrated food) was being distributed. Suddenly a novice like himself ran helter-skelter to the room to announce, "Ganen Mahārāj has come ; give Prasāda for him to me ; and mind you, he will have only the best of sweets." The man on duty at the room, another new Brahmachārin, said, "There is no hurry. He will anyway come this side to make salutations at the shrine, and then have the Prasāda. I am getting it ready in the meantime." "No," replied the messenger, "he won't take the trouble of elbowing through this thick crowd. He is waiting at the guest house after alighting from the boat." The writer was greatly intrigued by this strange behaviour ; but his young brain could not then unravel the mystery.

When Sister Sudhirā died of an accident at Benares in 1920, and the Sister Niveditā School was left without a Secretary to look after its external management and finances, Brahmachāri Ganendra Nāth, under the general guidance of Swāmi Sāradānanda, was entrusted with the work. Thus after the demise of Swāmi Sāradānanda, Ganendra had two institutions under his thumb —the Rāmakrishna Math, Bāghbāzār, including the *Udbodhan* Office, and the Niveditā School. He was a member of the Working Committee into the bargain. He took full advantage of this enviable position to consolidate his power. And to crown all, he came to have the control of a fortune left by a will dated April 11, 1923, by Jadupati Chatterjee, a devotee. Dame Rumour has it that the property valued at rupees four lakhs was about to be rejected by the authorities at Belur as too complicated to be properly administered by monks sworn to other-worldliness. At this juncture Brahmachāri Ganendra Nāth volunteered to manage it, if asked

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to do so. Accordingly, he had the management in hand along with all the documents, under a power of attorney granted to him by the Executor of the will, Swāmi Shivānanda. The monks, in their innocence, then forgot all about the details, believing that Ganendra could be relied on to look after the interest of the Mission adequately. In the interval, certain letters written by Jadupati, purporting to bequeath the estate to the Rāmakrishna Math, were discovered, and the estate was partially administered accordingly with some diversion of money for Math purposes. When the mistake was discovered, the people in authority wanted to make amends; but Ganendra had become intractable because of his differences with the authorities in respect of some trouble at the Niveditā School, where some women teachers, known for their spirit of renunciation and service, revolted against the Secretary and the Headmistress and complained to the Mission authorities, even when Swāmi Sāradānanda was alive. As, however, the Swāmi passed away in the midst of this affair, the Belur authorities felt it their duty to redress the grievances by removing Ganendra from office, to which the latter was not amenable. Matters were thus heading towards a disciplinary step against him. To make confusion worse confounded, Ganendra now held out a threat that the President of the Mission, who had innocently signed the power of attorney and had unwittingly acquiesced in spending some amount out of the Jadupati Chatterjee estate for the purpose of the Belur Math, would be implicated in a legal tangle, if Ganendra was not allowed to have his way. The President naturally became circumspect and fought shy of siding with any party whole-heartedly. The legal considerations apart, the President, as the loving head of the Order, thought it his bounden duty to try, till the last, for a reconciliation, assuring all at the same

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time that there was no cause for anxiety, since truth was bound to prevail. Yet some people, feeling the need of strong action as the only solution, interpreted this as mere pusillanimity.

To make the situation insoluble, certain elements at the *Udbodhan* Office sided with Ganendra in his defiance of the Belur authorities. Thus the whole affair took an ugly turn, and it seemed for a while that a long-drawn legal procedure was in store, tearing the Mission to pieces. The climax came on the 23rd June 1929. Ganendra's refusal to quit left the monks no alternative but to occupy the premises peacefully. Accordingly, on the above mentioned date, a good number of them quietly entered the house in the afternoon. Ganendra, who was out, got wind of this rather late, and arranged with an athletic club to send a batch of stalwarts to eject the monks. Curiously enough, there was to be group singing of the Lord's name in the house that evening, and all those men as well as many of Ganendra's insolent supporters joined in it. One thing they did not know. The monks had secured a court order for police protection against apprehended breach of peace, and just managed to send word to the police. So they came and posted themselves at the entrance. Immediately the hostile gathering slunk away, leaving the monks in undisturbed possession of the premises. Ganendra turned up late with a zealous friend, and they were shown the court order. Thereupon Ganendra was left alone. He went in, and after some time rushed out to take legal advice. Finding his nefarious plans foiled, he at last agreed to a compromise. We sum up the position in the words of Mr. (afterwards, Sir) D. N. Mitter, Solicitor for the Rāmakrishna Mission, as printed in *Facts about the Jadupati Chatterjee Estate :*

"Matters came into the hands of our firm some

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time in May, 1929, when Mr. R. M. Chatterjee, a very senior and respected member of the profession who was acting on behalf of Swāmi Shivānanda in the latter's capacity as executor to the estate of Jadupati Chatterjee, stated that in view of the fact that the Swāmi Shivānanda was interested in the estate in his threefold capacity as President of the Governing Body of the Mission, President of the Trustees of the Belur Math and executor to the estate of Jadupati Chatterjee, it was desirable that the Governing Body of the Rāmakrishna Mission should be represented by a separate attorney. . . . From 1923 till April, 1929, Ganendra Brahmachāri had been looking after the affairs of the estate under a Power of Attorney from Swāmi Shivānanda dated the 14th December, 1923. After the Governing Body had passed the resolution accepting the will on behalf of the Mission, attention of the authorities was drawn to several letters written by Jadupati Chatterjee to the President, and they were inclined to attach what we considered undue importance to passages such as 'It would go to the Math after my death.'" The Solicitor states that on this point a formal legal opinion was taken and was found to be against the acquisition of any right by the Math. Then he goes on, "Owing to vital differences with the authorities regarding the management of the Niveditā School and certain other reasons, Ganen Brahmachāri's connection with the Math and Mission was about to be terminated, and there was reasonable apprehension in the minds of all concerned that Ganen Brahmachāri, who was in charge of the *Udbodhan* Office, of the estate of Jadupati Chatterjee, and of the Niveditā School, would raise difficulties in the way of making over charge of the affairs of all these and a prolonged litigation was imminent." On the persuasion of Mr. R. M. Chatterjee, Ganendra was agreeable to a compromise ; but as a price

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of this he demanded fifty per cent of the entire Jadupati estate. It was also evident that without some such consideration, Ganendra would not release his hold on the two institutions. So "after prolonged negotiation a settlement was arrived at, under which the sum of Rs. 75,000 was paid to Ganen Brahmachāri and he gave up his lien on the assets of the estate of Jadupati Chatterjee, and Mr. R. M. Chatterjee as acting for the executor felt that he could proceed to wind up the estate and make over the proceeds to the Mission." "The Math authorities, as soon as they realised that the gift was to the Mission, made good what had been expended on the Math account by mistake, and this is shown in the executor's account as filed in court after examination by Mr. N. M. Majumdār, the auditor of the Mission." The Solicitor also justifies the payment of remuneration to Ganendra by referring to the facts "that the affairs of the estate were complicated and that the testator himself thought so and provided a much higher rate of remuneration." The three Mission institutions that mostly benefited by the proceeds of the estate were the Sister Niveditā School, on which Ganendra had already spent some money, and the Sevāshramas at Benares and Kankhal, which were specifically mentioned by Jadupati.

Thus, at long last, ended in July, 1929, a most ignoble chapter; but the tale of sorrow had yet many more pages. Ganendra walked out. His associates too had to be dealt with. Of these, Swāmi Bhumānanda was the chief, with his vile propaganda against the Math and Mission through literature as well as by word of mouth. And there were Baradānanda, Asitānanda, Tripurānanda, Chandreshwarānanda and a few others, who were either guilty of co-operation with the ring leaders or voluntarily withdrew from the organisation, their names being accordingly struck off the register of

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the Order. These, again took away with them a section of the devotees who used to frequent the *Udbodhan* monastery, and who for a time, thereafter, continued to be indifferent, or even hostile, to the Belur Math. But in course of time most of these devotees discovered their mistake and veered round. Some, however, among the disowned monks and the diehard dissident devotees started their own organisation, called the Vivekānanda Mission, which was registered on December 13, 1929.

Close on the heels of these events, trouble started in the South also. Swāmi Nirmalānanda had covertly sympathised with the Ganendra movement in Calcutta. The Math authorities had even then scented danger. But remedy was not ready at hand. Up till then the Math centres were being managed by monastic heads depending on their own personality and resources and submitting to nominal control from the headquarters. The Rāmakrishna Maths all over India, over which the Trustees of the Belur Math claimed authority, really formed one organisation under the Trust Deed of Swāmi Vivekānanda; but the headquarters, out of mutual faith and goodwill, desisted from forging any irksome formal machinery of control, depending on the willing allegiance of the members of the Order to maintain and strengthen both the spiritual and the legal links. Swāmi Nirmalānanda took advantage of what he thought a legal flaw to accept the Presidentship of the Vivekānanda Mission, and then to hoist the flag of revolt at Bangalore and at the South Indian centres which he had started, and where the monks in charge of affairs had been in some sense under his spiritual tutelage. Not that all such monks followed him; but the number was sufficiently large, and the centres concerned too many to be ignored. Besides, if Swāmi Nirmalānanda's contention that his centres were not legally subservient to the Belur Math and did not form

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a part of the original Trust, went uncontested, the disruption of the whole organisation would be quite within sight. As the Swāmi would not repent and modify his claim to independence, the Math authorities had to take the help of the court to make Bangalore a test case. As it always happens in civil suits, the matter hung fire for years. Fortunately, however, thanks to the indefatigable efforts of Swāmi Amriteshwarānanda, who spared no pains in thwarting this wicked attempt at disintegration, the court at last decided on August 13, 1935, in favour of the Belur authorities. As a result, Swāmi Nirmalānanda walked out of the Bangalore Āshrama and the Rāmakrishna Order with all his followers. But the Belur authorities could not pursue the costly procedure of suing him in all the independent courts of British India, Travancore and Cochin, under whose jurisdiction the different centres came. Besides, those centres were often too insignificant to merit consideration. Moreover, as a result of the Bangalore defeat, there occurred a split in the ranks of Swāmi Nirmalānanda, and some of the monks and Āshramas left him for good to rejoin the Belur Math. So, for the time being the authorities remained content with the favourable judgment of the court in the princely Mysore State. This moral victory and their patience repaid them amply. For soon after Swāmi Nirmalānanda's death another group of monks and Āshramas rejoined the parent institution at Belur, though a few of these again separated as a result of the non-recognition of Swāmi Nirmalānanda as a disciple of Shri Rāmakrishna—which he was not—by the Belur authorities.

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EXPANSION AND CONSOLIDATION
(1928—1938)

The events narrated at the end of the last chapter prove the fact that the organisation was sound of heart, though troubled externally. An honest brotherhood of monks, vowed to eschew lust and greed, seeking liberation from rebirth and taking the service of God in man for their motto, can be relied on to survive a hundred such shocks. Besides, such troubles are inseparable from any sustained organised activity. The public knew this and soon forgot the internal troubles of the monks. They still appreciated the Math and Mission, sought their advice and help in times of need, and supported them with men and money whenever the occasion demanded it. In fact, the years 1928-38 produced a glorious record of progress. Nevertheless, the monks felt the need of ordering the affairs of the Math and Mission in a more business-like way, as had so often been advocated by Swāmi Vivekānanda. It is true that ideas and ideals are the very life of a new movement, and it is these that ultimately determine its success. But as the soul requires a body, so does an ideology, specially under present-day conditions, require concrete expression through co-operative effort to make itself most effective. It was the tragedy of India's life that from time to time she made an all-out effort to cling to the Spirit alone, disregarding the fact that her social body shrivelled and came near to death in that attempt. The need in the modern age was for a balanced approach. India had her good qualities ; but she had her

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defects too, the result of centuries of foreign subjugation and self-complacence.

Swāmi Vivekānanda used to say about his countrymen: "There is too much talk, talk, talk! We are great, we are great! Nonsense! We are imbeciles, that is what we are. We speak of many things, parrot-like, but never do them; speaking and not doing has become a habit with us." "We are lazy; we cannot work, we cannot combine; we do not love each other; we are intensely selfish; not three of us can come together without hating each other, without being jealous of each other. That is the state in which we are—hopelessly disorganised mobs, immensely selfish, . . ." "The faculty of organisation is entirely absent in our nature, but this has to be infused. The great secret is—absence of jealousy. Be always ready to concede to the opinions of your brethren, and try always to conciliate." "The Hindus have a peculiar slovenliness in business matters, not being sufficiently methodical and strict in keeping account etc. All combined efforts in India sink under the weight of one iniquity—we have not yet developed strict business principles."

Such was the evaluation of Indian society by one of its best minds that loved India as no other could. The members of the Rāmakrishna Order, though expected to be above all such frailties just because of their pursuit of a higher life, could not all of them be wholly free from such national weaknesses; for were they not born and brought up in that vitiated atmosphere? A vestige of such national sins persisted in their minds in spite of themselves. They could not renounce their past inheritance all of a sudden. Add to this the fact that in a growing organisation there are bound to be some black sheep even after the social environment has been improved. Even well-organised institutions, require an efficient constitution if they are to work

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smoothly. Love and reverence and faithfulness to tradition are the vital bonds of a religious organisation ; but these bonds may snap unless the limbs of the organism are properly adjusted.

The years 1928-29 had taught a bitter lesson that could not be lost on the rising generation. It felt the need to correct past errors, as well as to put into vigorous execution the programme outlined by Swāmiji and developed by his co-disciples. The decade following Swāmi Sāradānanda was accordingly one of both expansion and consolidation. Far-reaching constitutional decisions were taken during these years. At the same time, the morale of the younger generation, no longer lowered by the misguiding influence of Ganendra and his supporters, was improved by the reforms carried out in the wake of the Convention, and expressed itself in all kinds of activities, both spiritual and philanthropic. In fact, the decade we are now considering differed from its predecessor in the quality of its leaders, the tempo of its activities and the spheres of its progress. All the time, however, the ideal was kept alive, and although the training recommended by the Convention could not be fully given shape to, the Belur Headquarters and the branches took conscious steps towards making the monks in general, and the novitiates in particular, better acquainted with the literature of the Math as well as with the basic Sanskrit books and philosophical systems. It did not take the organisation long to forget the nightmares it had passed through ; indeed, those evil days were a blessing in disguise, for they indicated the weak spots that had to be attended to. We shall see that this dark experience coloured subsequent events very strongly.

Swāmi Shuddhānanda, up till then the Joint Secretary, succeeded Swāmi Sāradānanda as Secretary of the Math and Mission. Swāmis Shankarānanda and

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Sharvānanda became Joint Secretaries; while Swāmi Akhandānanda continued to be the Vice-President, to which position he had been elevated after the election of Swāmi Shivānanda as President. The untoward events of 1928-29 now necessitated as a remedy the strengthening of the Board of Trustees by the inclusion of some younger monks. Earlier, on March 10, 1922, Swāmis Vishuddhānanda, Sharvānanda, Mādhavānanda and Amriteshwarānanda had been elected Trustees. On April 7, 1928, had been added Swāmis Yatishwarānanda, Kālikānanda, Rāghavānanda, Asimānanda and Ātmabodhānanda. On October 8, 1929, were elected Swāmis Ātmaprakāshānanda, Nirvānānanda, Vireshwarānanda, Nirvedānanda and Omkārānanda. On April 5, next year the Body was further strengthened by the inclusion of Swāmis Shāntānanda and Prabodhānanda, raising the total number to twenty-five. But as Swāmis Rāghavānanda and Kālikānanda withdrew voluntarily from the Trusteeship, the number was reduced again to twenty-three. Round about this time, the term "Assistant Secretary" was substituted for "Joint Secretary." There were now three Assistant Secretaries —Swāmis Shankarānanda, Sharvānanda and Mādhavānanda, the last named having been brought back from San Francisco in June, 1929, specially for work at the headquarters.

During the Ganendra episode, another fact had come to light. Some of the friends of that Brahmachārin had tried to undermine the foundation of the Mission by introducing diplomatic tactics into the deliberations of its General Meeting held on the 29th March, 1929, and the requisition meeting following it on the 5th May. Sincere well-wishers of the Mission, therefore, demanded, as a remedy, certain changes in the Rules and Regulations. Accordingly, as a result of the rules framed in the Extraordinary General Meeting

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of the 2nd June, 1929, the total number of Mission members was limited to 700 to guard against any attempt at swamping by sheer weight of numbers; applicants for membership had to be recommended by two members of the Governing Body; intending members had to declare in writing their allegiance to the ideals they purported to serve; a more effective provision was made for eliminating inactive and undesirable members, both lay and monastic, the Governing Body being vested with greater power in the case of the latter; extraordinary meetings were made more difficult to convene, so that except in an actual emergency no coterie might harass the executives at will; the quorum for ordinary meetings was raised to fifty, and for a meeting to change rules, to one hundred and fifty; and it was stipulated that in the latter case at least a two-thirds majority would be needed, and that for all meetings, fifteen days' clear notice would have to be served.

With such a strengthening of their position, the Math and Mission applied themselves afresh to their task of serving the physical, mental and spiritual needs of the age. During this period, quite a number of Maths were either founded anew or integrated with the Belur Math after having worked on similar lines for a long time outside the organisation. Thus the centres at Māldā, Dinājpur, Bānkurā, Trichur, Chandipur, Mymensingh, Bāgerhāt and Garbetā came to be unified with the Belur Math by the end of 1930. By 1933 were added the monasteries at Conjeeveram (now Kānchipuram), Puri, Jāhndi and Koālpārā and the Mission centre at Midnapore. The Āshrama at Karāchi was started in 1936.

The work in the Khāsiā and Jaintiā Hills, under Swāmi Prabhānanda, went on experimentally till 1936, when the Mission stepped in to assume direct respon-

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sibility. Even after the death of the chief organiser, Swāmi Prabhānanda, on December 12, 1938, others carried on the work successfully. With the growth of the work spread over a whole district, the Mission decided in 1949 to reorganise it under two separate centres—one at Shillong with its temple, preaching work, library, charitable dispensary and one primary school, and the other at Cherrapunji with its High School, hostel and other feeder institutions located in inaccessible villages near about.

An old practice mentioned in an earlier chapter, that of having mixed types of work at the same place, and often under the same roof, gained sufficient currency to be specifically classified in the Sixth General Report of the Mission, covering the years 1928-30, as combined Math and Mission centres. However, some of the Maths continued, as of old, to take up Mission work from time to time without making any change in their nomenclature. As an example of the latter process we cited in an earlier chapter the medical department organised by the Advaita Āshrama at Māyāvati. The charitable dispensary started by Madras Math in 1925 is another instance. More generally, however, many centres found it convenient to give different labels to the two kinds of work. One advantage of this arrangement was that the monks could have their own private life of traditionally religious observances in their Maths, allowing at the same time public worship and other activities there that could not normally be incorporated in the Mission. This side of their life was financed from the contributions of devotees and friends and the offerings made at the temples, for which nobody held the monks accountable. While thus the Math side remained unhampered, the Mission side on the other hand could have its managing committees, audit, inspection by the public or the Government and all the other parapher-

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nalia of administrative efficiency that the modern age demands. Under this head, at the end of 1930, were placed the Math and Mission at Madras and the centres at Bhubaneshwar, Allahabad, Dacca, Nārāyanganj, Sonārgāon, Bāliāti, Jayrāmbāti, Tamluk, Contai, Sylhet and Habiganj, the last four being new entrants.

Of the centres devoted exclusively to Mission work, the new ones listed at the end of 1938 were those at Perianāickenpālayam, Kānpur, Vizagapatam (now Vishākhapatnam), Āsānsol, Silchar and Tāki. To these should be added the Shishumangal Pratishthān of Calcutta, the Tuberculosis Sanatorium of Dungri, near Rānchi, the Institute of Culture in Calcutta and the Sāradā Vidyālaya of Madras. Some of these deserve more than a passing reference.

Let us take up the Shishumangal Pratishthān first. Swāmi Dayānanda, who had spent over five years in San Francisco, first as associate preacher of the Vedānta Society and then as its head since May, 1929, was greatly impressed by the advance in health services that had taken place in the Western countries in general. In contrast to the conditions prevailing in his own country, child care in particular had engaged his attention. So after his return from the West in December, 1931, he wanted to do something, howsoever modest, in the field of child welfare. In pursuance of this, the Shishumangal Pratishthān was started in July, 1932, in a rented house at 102 Bakul Bāgān Road, Bhowanipur, Calcutta, with only seven beds, "with the object of safeguarding the maternal and infantile health of the country against the appalling rate of mortality." The institution sought to attain this by giving regular hygienic instruction and efficient prenatal care to expectant mothers, providing skilled aid during confinement and taking systematic care of the new-born babies. The work and its remarkable efficiency soon

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attracted public sympathy and support, so that the Pratishthān was able to secure about an acre of land at 99 Lansdowne Road, on which a hospital building for fifty beds and other auxiliaries sprang up. The institution was removed there on the 1st June, 1939.

We proceed next to the Tuberculosis Sanatorium near Rānchi. The incidence of tuberculosis being alarmingly high in India, and the beds in the existing hospitals being quite inadequate for the purpose, the Mission decided in March, 1937 to start a Hospital-Sanatorium as a humble attempt to mitigate, however imperfectly, the ravages of the disease. To implement this decision, Swāmi Satyānanda, Assistant Secretary of the Benares Home of Service, secured in July, 1939 an extensive plot of land, measuring 240 acres, at Dungri, ten miles from Rānchi railway station, and with the little amount received as donations, he put up a few sheds there for the workers to supervise the construction of buildings. But as the site came under military control during the Second World War, further progress was arrested at this stage. The Mission could only resume the work much later, after the withdrawal of the army.

We leave aside the Rāmakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, for future treatment in its proper context.

The Rāmakrishna Mission Vidyālaya at Perianāickenpālayam, Dt. Coimbatore, Madras, was the creation of Shri T. S. Avināshilingam, a devotee of the Master, who was at the same time greatly imbued with the national spirit kindled by Mahātmā Gāndhi. The Vidyālaya was established in 1930 as a boarding home with only three boys. By leaps and bounds it soon evolved into a full-fledged residential High School with a rural service section extending to the surrounding villages, and was affiliated to the Mission in 1935. The

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year 1937 saw the introduction of what is known as the Wardhā system of education along with compulsory training in some vocational subjects. The administration is very progressive in its outlook and never misses an opportunity to benefit by the experiences of others. As a result, the institution has been expanding internally as also entering into fresh fields from time to time.

The Sāradā Vidyālaya of Madras had a different history, somewhat akin to that of the Sister Niveditā Girls' School of Calcutta. Its beginning is to be traced to the little "Home" for widows opened at Egmore, Madras, in the year 1912, with four inmates, under the care of Sister Subbalakshmi and her aunt Vālāmbāl Ammāl, both child widows. The Sāradā Ladies' Union, started by the Sister in the same year, inaugurated the Vidyālaya with twelve widows in a rented house at Triplicane in 1927. These girls got intensive training to become primary-school teachers and earn their living. As the school grew, it shifted to bigger rented buildings in different quarters of the city, till in 1938 the Sister applied to the Mission authorities for its integration. At that time there was a small Elementary School in the Māmbālam quarter of Madras under the management of the Vidyābhivardhini Sabhā, as also a small girls' section in the Mission Boys' High School. It was now proposed to amalgamate all the schools under the Sāradā Vidyālaya. The Mission took charge of the Vidyālaya from May 2, 1938, keeping intact its name and ideal. Then the Training School had only three classes—Higher Elementary Senior and Junior, and Preparatory. The Model Elementary School on Mahālakshmi Street served as the practising section. To these were added the Elementary School conducted by the Sabhā. The girls' section in the Boys' School was separated in 1940 to form a Girls' High School under the Rāmakrishna Mission Sāradā Vidyālaya.

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The Āshrama at Āsānsol had been in existence from 1924, though always in a moribund condition with two dilapidated houses meant to serve as a wayside resting place for poor pedestrians. In its present form, it was mainly the creation of Swāmi Sadbhāvānanda, the founder of the Rāmakrishna Mission Vidyāpith, Deoghar. While working at the Vidyāpith, still in its stage of early struggle, the Swāmi contracted tuberculosis, so that he had to relinquish charge in 1927 to undergo a long course of treatment. But such was his zeal for work that soon after recovery, he resumed his wonted life of activity at various places, till under the direction of the Mission he took over the Āsānsol Āshrama, affiliated to the Mission in the last part of 1938, to build it up into a fine educational institution. Providence, however, did not spare him for long. Still the momentum imparted by him, helped by the enthusiasm of subsequent younger workers, enabled the centre to maintain its steady progress.

The establishment of the centres at Karāchi (started in 1936) and Vishākhapatnam (started in 1938) was more a matter of central direction than indigenous growth. The same was true of the Shishumangal Pratishthān, the Tuberculosis Sanatorium and the Institute of Culture. In the case of the first and last, there might have been some vague local demand. But it was the headquarters that ultimately sanctioned the locality as well as the type of work, after considering alternatives from a broader standpoint of bringing fresh areas within the purview of the Math and Mission.

And with this we enter into an era of purposeful planning. We do not mean that such an idea was altogether new. The idea was there, but it lay dormant. The centres germinated and grew by individual or local initiative without any central direction. Localities were fixed upon mostly in accordance with the

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preference and the ability of the organisers concerned, who often changed their fields and types of work. For instance, somebody would start with medical work and then switch to education or *vice versa*. This involved a certain waste of energy, overlapping and undue concentration of centres in particular districts or provinces. The resolutions of the Convention of 1926, while drawing attention to these facts, aimed at investing the headquarters with greater power of supervision and planned to guard against such frittering away of energy. Besides, the sad incidents at the Udbodhan and the Bangalore Āshrama brought home the urgency for more active control and direction. As a result of experience, the new approach sought first to bring order out of chaos and then check with a strong hand the starting of new centres without adequate forethought. Up till then the pioneers had freedom to act as they liked. The result was a speedy growth in numbers, but not in quality. Not that the centres lacked sincerity or spiritual depth; but they had not the wherewithal for the proper discharge of their duties according to modern standards of efficiency. It is a wonderful thing to sit by a patient stricken with small pox or plague and nursing him without caring for one's personal safety; it is admirable to tend a child with the love of a parent. But when a Sevāshrama lacked suitable equipment and the latest medical service, or a school was in want of trained teachers, or a Students' Home deficient in food for its wards, it became obvious that personal devotion was not enough. In fact, the whole policy of giving rein to the personal predilections of the organisers needed thorough rethinking. And that is what the Mission set about doing at this stage. The first step was to decide about the future of the innumerable centres that had grown up non-officially. Those with which the monks had been intimately connected for years, or those with which

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the Mission had become otherwise associated legally or morally, could not simply be thrown overboard ; at the same time, their full acceptance meant adding greater responsibility. A bold, honest and practical course was either to hand them over to other reliable parties where such were ready to take them up, or, where that was not possible, to affiliate them forthwith. The Mission adopted both these processes, the second one being more in evidence. The centres at Silchar, Tāki and Āsānsol, for instance, were accepted by the Mission on this consideration.

In the face of such a sudden increase in total responsibility and the impossibility of a quick influx of monastic hands, consolidation and planned progress required the checking of growth for a while. The short account of expansion presented in this chapter will convince the reader that during the closing years of the decade under consideration, very few new centres were added. The few that were actually added were the outcome of a conscious plan of balanced evolution. If expansion was not totally banned at this stage, it was not because the need for such a check was not felt, but because any such sudden and peremptory stifling of the urge to extend would be tantamount to a strangulation of the organisation, which had yet to learn that consolidation was a necessary precursor of lasting growth, and that expansion *per se* was not a virtue.

The decade witnessed a similar expansion in the U.S.A. New York came to have two centres in place of one. And new centres were established in Chicago, St. Louis, Hollywood, Seattle and Cohasset (Mass.).

Swāmi Jnāneshwarānanda, who had founded the Rāmakrishna Āshrama at Patnā, and whom we met as a member of the Working Committee, had been posted to New York as an assistant to Swāmi Bodhānanda in November, 1927. After working at this post up to

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October, 1929, he proceeded to Chicago late in December and started a centre there on January 19, 1930. In New York, Swāmi Devātmānanda stepped into his shoes. Chicago witnessed the first world recognition of Swāmi Vivekānanda, and it was but proper that it should have a permanent Vedānta Society, situated near the Lake at 120 East Delaware Place, in a very respectable quarter.

The Vedānta Society of Providence, Rhode Island, was inaugurated by Swāmi Akhilānanda on September 9, 1928. He was lucky enough to dedicate on February 22, 1931, the permanent home of the Society called the Hindu Temple, at 224 Angell Street.

In July, 1929, Swāmi Paramānanda started the Vedānta Centre of Cohasset, about 23 miles from Boston, as a lovely retreat attached to that centre.

Important changes of personnel took place at San Francisco. Swāmi Dayānanda, with the assistance of Swāmi Vividishānanda, carried on the work there till he too left for India in August, 1931, being succeeded by Swāmi Vividishānanda. Assisted by Swāmi Ashokānanda, the gifted ex-Editor of the *Prabuddha Bhārata,* who had joined the centre in July, Swāmi Vividishānanda conducted the work till he fell ill and had to leave the centre, handing over charge to Swāmi Ashokānanda in June, 1932. The new Swāmi gained increasing popularity, so that he was called upon to extend his activities to neighbouring places. He also succeeded in building in August, 1938, a retreat on Lake Tahoe, in a beautiful part of the Sierra Nevada range.

Swāmi Prabhavānanda continued to work at Portland till December, 1929, when he left for Hollywood, leaving Swāmi Vividishānanda in charge. But owing to financial difficulties, the centre had to be suspended from June, 1930.

Swāmi Prabhavānanda met with signal success in Hollywood, where he organised a Vedānta Society at

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1946 Ivar Avenue (now Vedānta Place), the building being named the Vivekānanda Home.

In 1930, the nucleus of a Vedānta Society was formed at Washington by Swāmi Akhilānanda, head of the Providence centre, and in November, 1931, it was placed under Swāmi Vividishānanda, who worked there till May, 1936, when he went to Denver to start another centre. Swāmi Akhilānanda then resumed his duties at Washington, being partially relieved from his work at Providence by the arrival of Swāmi Satprakāshānanda at the end of 1936.

In February, 1932, Portland (Oregon) was visited by Swāmi Prabhavānanda of Hollywood, and shortly after by Swāmi Devātmānanda. Through their efforts the Vedānta Society of Portland was revived and placed under the charge of Swāmi Devātmānanda. The Society now made substantial progress, so that on April 20, 1934, it came to occupy its permanent home, called the Vedic Temple, at 1206 N.W. 25th Avenue.

Feeling the need for a greater development of the Rāmakrishna Movement in a vast city like New York, a number of students and admirers of Vedānta decided to organise a new centre whereby an increasing number of people might be attracted to this philosophy. Accordingly, the Rāmakrishna-Vivekānanda Centre of New York was started in May, 1933, in a centrally located building at 200 West 57th Street, with Swāmi Nikhilānanda of the Vedānta Society as the leader. The new centre soon became popular and continued to flourish.

Unfortunately, the Chicago centre received a most unexpected blow at the premature death of Swāmi Jnāneshwarānanda in November, 1937. This left the place without a minister till Swāmi Vishwānanda, head of the Bombay centre, took charge of it in May, 1938. He changed the name of the Society into the Vivekānanda Vedānta Society.

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Swāmi Vividishānanda, who worked experimentally at Denver till June, 1938, left the place for the much bigger city of Seattle (Washington), where he found greater response and possibilities of permanence. His expectations were fulfilled in due course.

Swāmi Satprakāshānanda also succeeded in starting a new centre at St. Louis (Missouri) in October, 1938. His efforts too were appreciated as time progressed.

Wonderful as this march of events was in the U.S.A., the other foreign countries too evinced an active interest in the Vedāntic message, so much so that it exceeded the supply of trained workers from Belur. Even so, at the end of 1938, permanent centres either grew up, or were about to grow up, in Singapore, Argentina, Germany, South Africa, England, France and Fiji.

The Mission centre at Singapore was started in July, 1928, in response to a growing demand on the part of the local Indians for the ideas of the Rāmakrishna Mission, to which an impetus had been given by the visit of Swāmi Sharvānanda in 1919. Swāmi Ādyānanda was put in charge of the centre. Thanks to his unremitting zeal, the Mission got a building of its own at 9 Norris Road, which it occupied in February, 1932. Swāmi Ādyānanda was succeeded by Swāmi Bhāswarānanda in April, 1933.

The call of Vedānta reached the shores of far-off Argentina, where sufficient interest was awakened at Buenos Aires, its capital and the largest city in South America, to ask for a teacher. Accordingly, Swāmi Vijayānanda was deputed in October, 1932, to inculcate the ancient message of the Vedas there. He succeeded in arousing such active enthusiasm that a permanent centre came to be founded in March, 1933. The Swāmi learnt Spanish, the language of the country, and

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this also opened an avenue for reaching a wider public through books in that language.

Germany, ever noted for its love of Sanskrit culture, was the next to wake up to the need of hearing Vedānta from the lips of one who actually lived it, and she got such a teacher in the person of Swāmi Yatishwarānanda, a senior member of the Order who had once been President of the Rāmakrishna Maths at Bombay and Madras as well as Editor of *Prabuddha Bhārata*. At the invitation of a group of earnest souls he arrived in November, 1933, at Weisbaden, in the Rhineland. From the winter of 1935 to the end of 1938 he extended his activity to Switzerland, forming study circles at St. Moritz and later at Geneva and other places, and also worked for several months at the Hague, in Holland, as also in Paris and London.

And then came a call from South Africa, to answer which Swāmi Ādyānanda went there in January, 1934. The Swāmi was warmly received. His first destination was Johannesburg. But he also visited Pretoria, Pietermaritzburg, Durban and many other places, at all of which he delivered lectures and was greeted enthusiastically by scholars and common people alike.

Then London, which seemed to have forgotten Vedānta after the successful preaching there by Swāmi Vivekānanda and his two brother-disciples in the closing years of the last century, again felt the urge for a reappraisal of life in the light of Indian spirituality. This was presented by Swāmi Avyaktānanda, who started work in October, 1934, in fulfilment of a cherished dream of the Order to have a permanent centre in London.

The last addition in Europe was a centre in Paris organised by Swāmi Siddheshwarānanda, who was deputed in July, 1937, on the invitation of some sincere friends. The first few months he had to spend in master-

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ing the language. Then he began his work, at first with the help of an interpreter, but very soon he took up preaching, writing, giving interviews and conducting meditation classes, all in French.

In the field of foreign work, two more developments —this time in Asia—have to be noted before we finish. By an order of the British Government, Burma was separated from India on April 1, 1937. Nevertheless, the two centres there—the Sevāshrama, which had by then become a very prominent hospital, and the Society, which worked as a big library and reading room, with preaching as an additional activity—continued to be administered as part and parcel of the Mission at Belur.

A new-comer in the Asian sphere was the Mission centre in Fiji. The visit of Swāmi Avināshānanda in May, 1937, on invitation from the Indian settlers in the main Island, aroused great interest. So, when he left the Island on grounds of health, after eight months of successful work, Swāmi Rudrānanda was sent by the Mission in January, 1939, to continue the work, with his headquarters at Nadi.

The educational and cultural activities of the Mission in Ceylon also progressed steadily during the period, and showed some minor growth too.

The reader has to be warned here that though we have grouped all these centres under the category of foreign work, there is much difference among them as regards their legal status and scope of work. The centres in Asia enumerated above are all constituted under the Mission. All of them, except the two in Burma, have their separate registration under local ordinances, which, however, provide for intimate legal connection with the Belur Headquarters. They conduct cultural, educational and philanthropic work just like their prototypes in India, though religious activity is not altogether left out.

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The foreign centres in Europe and America, however, carry on purely spiritual work consisting in public preaching, group studies, private interviews, meditation, worship, publication of religious and philosophical books, and so on. There may be a little variation on this general programme according to local needs. But these are the common features to be met with almost everywhere.

So far we have spoken about the permanent Math and Mission institutions in and outside India. In these pages we have purposely avoided too many references to the temporary relief works, since they are quite frequent and just a normal feature of the activities of the Math and Mission. But one particular work deserves notice because of its magnitude and the tremendous human suffering that the Mission was called upon to mitigate. In fact, it was the biggest project of its kind undertaken so far. In the afternoon of January 15, 1934, Bihar experienced one of the severest seismic shocks in the recorded history of the world, which levelled to the ground many towns and took a heavy toll of life. Through fourteen centres organised in different localities, the Mission constructed or supplied cash and material for the erection of 4,365 semi-permanent or temporary huts, distributed in addition 1,356 corrugated iron sheets, over 116 tons of food-stuffs, about 25,500 pieces of cloth, 7,706 cotton blankets, 11 bales and 25,200 yards of hessian, about 6,000 utensils and vessels and many more things besides. The total cost came to Rs. 1,14,028.

So the work advanced at the same time that the organisation tried its best to consolidate its position and increase its efficiency in every field. We have dealt with the growth, and now it is time to take up more fully the problems of consolidation. Besides, we have to take

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notice of the many other important events that took place during the decade.

We commented earlier on a few changes in the Mission constitution brought about in 1929. But whereas with the Mission it was a question of mere addition and amendment, and not a rethinking of the whole situation, the position of the Math was entirely different. There was a Deed of Trust by Swāmi Vivekānanda, which was not only sacrosanct in the eyes of the monks, but also legally binding and unalterable without adequate court proceedings. Its provisions could be interpreted within the limits of law to make room for some needed reforms, but such stretching of meaning was always liable to be challenged and involve legal action, as it actually happened in the case of Ganendra and Swāmi Nirmalānanda. Then there were the Math Rules framed by Swāmiji. True, these were not legally binding, but only expressed the wishes of the great Swāmi as the originator of the Trust and founder of the organisation. None the less, they had such tremendous moral and spiritual significance that nobody dared to touch them. Short of taking the help of law, then, the only course open to the Belur authorities was to proceed slowly and cautiously to build up, with the concurrence of all the monks, a tradition that would in course of time become binding as an accepted usage.

The problem they were faced with was, to put it in a few words, a better integration of the various Math centres so as to form an inseparable, composite whole without regimenting the monastic units and throttling their personal initiative. There should be obedience to authority as well as democratic association with administration and ascertainment of the general opinion on issues of importance; discipline including expulsion from the Order, together with a proper selection of

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candidates for admission and their thorough training during probation; and more insistence on service coupled with a heightening of the spiritual life. To give effect to these ideas, the authorities decided to call a Conference of the monks at Belur in April, 1935. Almost all who could extricate themselves temporarily from their duties attended it; and some came even from across the seas. It was altogether a very representative gathering, the first of its kind after the Convention of 1926.

To give an authoritative idea of the purpose and scope of the Conference, we shall translate a portion from the address of welcome delivered by Swāmi Virajānanda, the then Secretary of the Rāmakrishna Math and Mission. Said he, "You know that in the Rules that Swāmiji left behind in this Math for the guidance of this organisation, he instructed all to be specially careful about maintaining its unity. If the ideal of *'Ātmano mokshārtham jagaddhitāya cha'* (for one's own salvation and for the good of the world) is to be actualised, we shall have to preserve intact an atmosphere of love, friendship and co-operation among ourselves. There should be amity between the main centre and its branches, as also among the heads of centres and their workers, and all of us will have to sacrifice every parochial idea about the interests and independence of our particular centres as well as thoughts of personal comfort and prestige so as to strive with all our might to encompass the good of the entire organisation. As in a family all consider themselves to belong to the same unit despite petty differences, similarly must we all regard ourselves as members of the same family, so that differences may not culminate in disruption. An effort should be made for the increase of trust and love among us. Most often it is distance that generates all kinds of fanciful suspicions, which are removable by close con-

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tact and a frank exchange of views. Therefore I request you to discuss freely and patiently all subjects that are conducive to the good of the organisation.

"It has appeared to us that some rules have got to be framed that are needful at the present juncture for the spiritual uplift of the monks in all our centres through a harmonious blend of work, study and spiritual effort. You have been invited here to ascertain the views of the different centres with regard to these. You can change, reject or amplify these rules in whatever way you like, after discussing them among yourselves. I hope you will look upon them as an attempt at putting into practice some of the Math Rules framed by Swāmiji.

"Another point we must bear in mind. . . . As one cannot freely experiment with a living organism, similarly it will not be wise to experiment with certain vital matters affecting the organisation, depending for one's guidance merely on some theories. For evolution is entirely different from revolution."

Swāmi Shuddhānanda, President of the Conference, added the following remarks: "In view of the expansion of the activities of the Math and Mission, it is necessary to see that the Rules framed by Swāmiji are put into practice in conformity with the requirements of the time. The history of framing the first rules of the Math is this: After Swāmiji's return from the West, a Brahmachārin requested him for some well-defined rules. At Swāmiji's instance all assembled in the hall at the Ālambāzār Math, when Swāmiji said, 'Our objective is to transcend all rules, for we are Sannyāsins and free. Still there is need of eliminating bad rules with the help of good ones, and then to reject the latter also. This is the goal of rules. Rules by themselves are of no avail unless we ourselves are good. Rules invite an attempt at breaking them. Monks should never take

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a wrong step. The purpose of establishing an organisation and framing rules is to enable new-comers to imbibe through them the ideal, which is: 'For one's own salvation and for the good of all.' "

The minutes of the Conference record: "The draft Rules and Regulations for the Rāmakrishna Math which had been circulated among heads of branch centres and senior monks of the Order were then put before the house for a general discussion." After addition and amendment by the Conference, these were sanctioned with certain modifications by the Trustees, and then came to be known as the "Rules and Regulations of the Rāmakrishna Order, 1935." The Rules were divided into five sections: I. Headquarters, II. Discipline, III. Admission, IV. Code of Conduct, and V. Training.

The Rules started with the implied premise that there was need for the headquarters to assert its rightful position in the organisation: "For improving its relation with the branches, the headquarters will do well to increase the amount of active interest it takes in the well-being of the centres." By way of offering practical suggestions for implementing this, the Rules point out the necessity of (*a*) having some central fund, (*b*) promptness in the posting of workers, (*c*) caution in opening new centres, (*d*) previous sanction of the headquarters in initiating any new work by branch centres that is entirely different in type, or that would require more monastic hands, (*e*) visit of centres by senior monks, (*f*) meetings of heads of centres and senior members in a province, (*g*) a Conference every two years at the headquarters, (*h*) annual inspection of general working and accounts, and (*i*) publication of a quarterly bulletin from the headquarters.

Under section II, Discipline, the Rules sought (*a*) to regulate the manner in which monks should "mix"

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with outsiders, both men and women, and (*b*) to put certain restrictions on their conduct. The Rules also defined the circumstances under which a novitiate or monk could be disowned or put under disciplinary restraint.

Under section III, Admission, the Rules defined the qualifications of candidates for admission. In addition to a high standard of morality and spiritual aspiration, he was to have read up to the Matriculation standard of a High School and was to be between the ages of 18 and 30 years. Health, active habit, etc. were also to be given due weight. The candidate should be observed by the local head for at least a year within or outside the centre.

About training, the Rules prescribed an elaborate curriculum of study. A candidate could apply for Brahmacharya after such theoretical and practical training for four years; and a Brahmachārin could aspire to Sannyāsa after another four years, his fitness for it being judged by the elders.

By a tacit arrangement between the Conference and the Trustees it was decided that in selecting the members of the Working Committee, opinions of heads of centres and senior monks would be taken into consideration.

This being a first attempt at codification, and the initiative having been taken over from the hands of the central administration by the attending monks at the very beginning of the Conference, there crept in an element of idealism, which future history proved to be unpractical, and to that extent some of the Rules remained a dead letter. For instance, the scheme of training was aimed too high to be realised in the next twenty years. The other important point was that, although the Rules were framed for the Math, it was assumed that certain portions would apply *pari passu*

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to the Mission also, for the sanctioning body, the Trustees, formed also the Governing Body of the latter, and the working monks were expected to act similarly in both the Math and Mission spheres. If thoughtless expansion was bad in the Math, it was equally so in the Mission. The Math Rules could extend to other administrative questions affecting the Mission. For instance, visits by senior monks could easily be enforced without having any such specific Mission rule. Besides, another point was taken for granted. These Rules were not to supplant, but rather to supplement, the Deed of Trust and the Rules of the Belur Math left behind by Swāmi Vivekānanda. In any formal point of dispute, the Trust Deed would have the highest authority; and next in importance would come Swāmiji's Rules.

This was a step in the right direction; but still many important points remained vague. In particular, the legal relation between the headquarters and the branches had to be more clearly defined; so also the ownership of land, buildings, etc. In the course of evolution, properties had been accepted in diverse ways and in various names. To draw up fresh, correct documents was not at all a practicable proposition; and often it was impossible. Of course, from the common-sense point of view all were but Math properties, and the monks belonged to the Math; so they would not challenge the authority of the Trustees. Strictly speaking, the legal position too was strongly in favour of the Trustees. But in the light of what had happened in the past, the authorities wanted to make the position more secure. So with expert legal advice another elaborate set of rules was drafted and circulated among the monks for their opinion. Then in the second Monks' Conference, held in March, 1937, they were discussed threadbare and passed with some alterations. With the seal of approval of the Trustees, these Rules passed

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current as the "Rules and Regulations of the Rāmakrishna Math, 1937." For all practical purposes, these Rules now almost wholly regulate the constitutional or business side of the Order, though their scope is often far greater. They have some features in common with the 1935 Rules; but they deviate at many points and add new features almost at every turn. In spite of all the care bestowed on them, however, there were certain lacunae which, according to later interpretation, were to be filled up by the 1935 Rules. So the position now seemed to be like this: The Trust Deed remained supreme in all matters of administration and spiritual life. The 1937 Rules came next in importance so far as the constitution and administration were concerned, unspecified points in these being supplemented by the 1935 Rules. As for Swāmiji's Rules, they remained still supreme in all matters of faith and belief, and as pointers to the attitude with which other problems were to be approached, studied and solved. All the same, so far as specific practical decisions were concerned, the 1937 Rules acquired an authority and importance of their own, and no question of comparison arose in anybody's mind.

The 1937 Rules open with a solemn preamble in a legal form: "In order to systematise the business and other affairs of the Math organisation and to maintain a uniformity in the administration both at Belur and at various branch Maths or Āshramas or centres of work, the President and Trustees of the Belur Math, following the usage obtaining hitherto, have prescribed the undermentioned rules and regulations (subject to such modifications and additions as may be made from time to time) by way of supplement to and on the lines of Swāmi Vivekānanda's Trust Deed of 1901."

Just like the 1935 Rules, the new Rules also dealt with admission and discipline, sometimes more tacitly

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and succinctly and sometimes more explicitly and elaborately. A new clause was introduced to legalise the Monks' Conference, which was, however, to be held every three years, instead of two. The qualifications for the delegates to the Conference were precisely defined. The Working Committee too was put on a legal footing. A *via media* between nomination by the Trustees and election by the senior monks was adopted for selecting new Trustees. The Trustees were empowered to frame new rules and modify or rescind old ones. Parallel to the Governing Body of the Mission, provision was made for the creation of offices and appointment of office-bearers. The Maths and Āshramas outside Belur were specifically classed as branch centres and placed under the Belur Math in every way. Their properties were vested in the Board of Trustees of the Belur Math, and all moneys and deposits were to stand in the name of the particular institution, or the Board of Trustees, or two or more Trustees on behalf of the Board. And a machinery was set up for keeping regular touch with these branch centres, which were to submit reports and accounts regularly to the headquarters.

The Mission kept pace with the constitutional development of the Math. The unexpressed hope had been entertained by the monks attending the first Conference that some of the Math Rules would apply also to the Mission. But there were two snags. First, there was no legal sanction for thus stretching the Math Rules. Secondly, some of the Mission centres had lay members as their executive officers, and most of them had local Managing Committees with a majority of lay members, who either did not know these rules or could not with any decency be asked to conform to them. So the Mission Rules were again revised in 1937 to reorganise the administrative machinery, and to mend the constitutional defects. As the storm of 1929 had

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spent itself, the Member's Declaration Form was simplified. The duties and functions of the Governing Body and its office-bearers were better defined, and in some matters the Governing Body was vested with greater executive powers. The idea of "affiliation" of institutions was given up in favour of outright integration, the new institutions becoming regular branches. It was, however, specifically declared that the accounts of these branches would be kept separate, and that no money would be diverted from one to another. At the same time it was stipulated that all the properties, howsoever acquired, would stand in the name of, and be vested in, the Governing Body of the Association. The powers and functions of the branch Secretary were more clearly defined so as to make him the executive head in preference to the President, the Chief Supervisor and others, who had often occupied that position in earlier years. The term of the Local Committee became limited to two years ; all mention of election of its members by any outside agency was deleted ; and it was clearly stated that they would be appointed by the Governing Body. A salutary innovation was the provision for the formation of Advisory Committees and Sub-committees. The Chief Supervisor still survived anachronistically as a member of the Local Committee ; but his function became confined to giving "suggestions" to the local Secretary "without interfering in the practical management of the centre." The point to note here is that the Chief Supervisor served as the connection between the branches and the headquarters in those early days when the Local Committee of each branch enjoyed the maximum freedom. Along with this, the headquarters lacked the necessary funds, both in the Math and Mission departments, to keep any effective connection with or control over the branches, so much so that one had to be parsimonious

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even in the matter of business correspondence. In the light of this, the reader can understand why the Monks' Conference of 1935 recommended the creation of some funds at the headquarters for administrative purposes.

The result of the 1937 amendments, both in the Math and the Mission, was that the spectre of disruption that stared one in the face even in the early thirties was finally disposed of. The organisation now stood on the solid rock of goodwill and constitutional coherence.

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CENTENARY TRIBUTES TO THE MASTER

(1936—1938)

The Shri Rāmakrishna Birth Centenary, the best achievement of the decade we have just dealt with, has been reserved by us for separate treatment; for it is an event by itself. It crowned half a century of trials and tribulations, delays and advances, battle and victory, beginning from the inception of the Movement in 1886, when Shri Rāmakrishna lay sick at the Cossipore garden-house, and around him gathered the young hopefuls, the future apostles of the avatar. And a hundred years had now passed since his birth in the distant village of Kāmārpukur on February 18, 1836. It was in the fitness of things that his followers should make this an occasion for world-wide joy and a fresh attempt to propagate his message. For after this experience of half a century, they were convinced that in it lay the panacea for the ailments of the world. Shri Rāmakrishna was verily the prophet of the age.

The Centenary was formally sponsored by top-ranking people like Rabindra Nāth Tagore, M. R. Jayakar, S. Rādhākrishnan, P. C. Roy, Romain Rolland, C. P. Rāmaswāmi Iyer, Madan Mohan Mālaviya, Tej Bahādur Sapru, Allādi Krishnaswāmi Iyer, Annāmalai Chettiār, Ba Yin, Badridās Goenkā, to mention only a few from among many celebrities. The Centenary celebrations commenced with the birthday of Shri Rāmakrishna on February 24, 1936, and ended a week after the next birthday, on March 21, 1937.

The response was spontaneous, hearty and widespread. As a matter of course, the Rāmakrishna Math

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and Mission rose to the occasion in offering their whole-hearted homage to the holy Incarnation in the most befitting manner; and others also, individually and collectively, both in India and abroad, participated in the various functions in co-operation with the General Committee in Calcutta, which was formed by the prominent citizens headed by Swāmi Akhandānanda as President, and Swāmi Abhedānanda, R. N. Tagore, R. Rolland, Rājendra Prasād, T. B. Sapru, J. C. Bose, S. Rādhākrishnan, U. Set, S. W. Dassenāike, Ba Yin, Giovanni Gentile, Sylvain Levi and many others as Vice-Presidents. To facilitate the work, the General Committee was split up into a Working Committee, an Executive Committee and several Sub-committees, in which important parts were played by Hon'ble Justice Sir Manmatha Nāth Mukherji as President, Bejoy Krishna Bose as Secretary, and Swāmi Sambuddhānanda and Rai Bahadur Hrishikesh Mukherji as Assistant Secretaries of the Executive Committee. The same persons held the corresponding posts in the Working Committee also with Swāmi Shuddhānanda as another Secretary. But the brunt of the work fell on Swāmi Sambuddhānanda, who was splendidly helped by Prof. Benoy Kumār Sarkār. To the indefatigable energy of these two the celebrations owed much of their success. There were other earnest workers in different fields; but we cannot afford to name them individually.

Elaborate preparations having been gone through from November, 1934, the celebrations were inaugurated at the Belur Math on February 24, 1936, and continued for a week. "The magnetic influence of the name of the Master brought a huge concourse of people every day to the Math; but on the opening and the last day, the rush was quite unprecedented. The serene grandeur of the occasion, coupled with the devout enthusiasm of the devotees, filled every heart with a sublime spiritual

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inspiration rarely to be experienced in the ordinary course of our daily existence" (The Report of the Inaugural Celebrations, p. 2).

Simultaneously with the Belur functions, inaugural celebrations were held at innumerable other places; the one at Benares is specifically mentioned in the Report just quoted. A few events in this connection deserve special reference. An imposing stone temple of Shri Rāmakrishna was opened at the Rāmakrishna Advaita Āshrama by Swāmi Vijnānānanda, Vice-President of the Order. The local monks of various orders were sumptuously fed. And a Convention of Religions lasting from March 1 to March 5 was held, in which all religions and denominations took part, and over which the great heads of the traditional religious orders presided.

Three other Conventions of the same kind were conducted with success—at New Delhi from March 20 to March 22; at Nāgpur from March 1 to March 3; and at the Ardha-Kumbha Fair or the six-yearly concourse of monks and pilgrims of all denominations at Allahabad, which preceded the Convention at Benares. One tangible result of the meetings at these holy places was the close association of the orthodox monks with the celebrations and their open acknowledgement of the Master as the prophet of the age. In Calcutta too, a largely attended meeting was held at the Town Hall on February 26, over which the Maharaja of Santosh presided. These few meetings and Conventions were but the precursors of a host of others that followed in their wake in many other places all over the world.

Thus inaugurated, the celebrations continued for a whole year with festivals, meetings, processions, music, dramatic performances, fairs and exhibitions, as well as worship, sacrifices and congregational prayers, the erection of temples and memorial buildings, the establishment of permanent centres of worship, culture and ser-

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vice, and the publication of books and special issues of papers and periodicals.

The whole of India, as also many other countries, joined in the expression of their joy and reverence for the Master. India especially did so in all possible towns and villages. In fact, in the words of the Ninth General Report of the Mission (1936-37), "It will not be far from the truth to say that in India, the celebrations were held on a national scale, and hundreds of thousands participated in them."

As a fitting conclusion to the Centenary celebrations, Calcutta was again busy with rejoicings, processions, meetings, etc. in the beginning of 1937. Of these, the international Parliament of Religions held in the Town Hall for eight days from March 1, 1937, "was perhaps the most important of all the items in the programme of the celebrations. Indeed it was the first time in the history of this country that such a congregation of distinguished men and women from different parts of the world took place on the soil of India" (*The Religions of the World,* p. v). Amongst those who presided over the fifteen sessions, there was one each from Argentina, China, Czecho-Slovakia, England, Iran and the United States of America. Among the Indian celebrities who presided may be mentioned Sir Brajendra Nāth Seal—the General President, Rabindra Nāth Tagore, Kākā Kālelkar, Dr. D. R. Bhāndārkar and Dr. A. B. Dhruva. The number of papers read and lectures delivered was one hundred and ten, dealing with "The Ideas of Religion," "Religion and Culture," "The Religious Systems of the World," "Rāmakrishna and Vivekānanda," "Religion and Philosophy," "Religion and Social Service," "Historical, Comparative and Other Studies of Religion," and "Religion and Current Problems." The Master came for the harmony of religions, and it was

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a fitting tribute to his memory to exchange views from the same platform on varied aspects of all important religions of the world in a free and friendly way. The full texts or résumés of the papers and speeches were printed in two beautiful volumes called *The Religions of the World,* under the supervision of Swāmi Ghanānanda.

Another publication of lasting interest was *The Cultural Heritage of India,* a monumental work in three volumes, in which one hundred eminent Indian scholars presented the past achievements of India in the fields of arts, architecture, science, literature, philosophy and religion, along with an interpretative life of Shri Rāmakrishna himself.

Apart from giving wide publicity to the ideas and ideals for which the Master stood, and from enlisting many valuable members to the cause of upholding and advancing the new message, the celebrations left behind many permanent marks. Many Math and Mission centres were enabled during this year to expand their activities in various ways and to add to their permanent structures, which, however, are too many to enumerate here. We shall particularly mention the Rāmakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, which was a direct result of the Centenary. The Institute was established in January, 1938, by the Mission with the funds and books placed at its disposal by the Centenary Committee in fulfilment of one of the projects of the latter. The institution has "for its object the carrying out and realisation of the universal teachings of that great Seer of modern India through the study and promotion of the creative achievements and spiritual experiences of the diverse races, castes, classes and communities of mankind on a scientific, comparative and cosmopolitan basis." Started humbly in a rented room, the Institute, soon attracted attention by its lecture courses on cultural

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subjects, as also by *The Cultural Heritage of India*, which became its property.

The Colombo Ashrama, started on October 22, 1930, in a temporary house, took advantage of the Centenary to complete its permanent home, the foundation of which had been laid on March 6, 1935, the previous birthday of Shri Rāmakrishna. The new building was dedicated at the very commencement of the Centenary on February 24, 1936. In the same year, on April 26 was opened its "Jerbāi Memorial Hall," while the Shri Rāmakrishna Centenary Temple and Prayer Hall was dedicated on January 4, 1938.

As a fitting epilogue to the year-long Centenary celebrations, we proceed with joy to give here a brief history of the erection of the magnificent temple of Shri Rāmakrishna at the Belur Math, which partly synchronised with the Centenary. As the plan emanating from Swāmi Vivekānanda envisaged a very large temple, too costly for the monks and the generality of devotees, it had to wait for nearly four decades to be embodied in a stone edifice of large proportions—the kind of building of which the monks had always dreamed. To fulfil the desire of many to associate the first generation with the erection of the temple, Swāmi Shivānanda laid the foundation stone on March 13, 1929, the birthday of Shri Rāmakrishna, though the wherewithal for the construction was nowhere in sight. Five more years passed by without bringing any better prospect. Meanwhile, Swāmi Shivānanda was no more. Then in 1934 came a very welcome offer from across the seas. Swāmi Akhilānanda, head of the Vedānta Society of Providence, U.S.A., proposed to meet all the expenses of the temple. It was the munificence of a devoted student of his, Miss Helen F. Rubel, also known as Bhakti, which enabled him to meet by far the largest portion of the expenditure. On surveying the site of the temple,

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it was found that the foundation stone laid by Swāmi Shivānanda had been a little misplaced. So on July 16, 1935, the auspicious day of Snāna-yātrā, the stone was ceremonially moved to its proper position by Swāmi Vijnānānanda, the preliminary work having been commenced with his blessings on March 10, by Messrs. Martin and Company, Calcutta, who had received the contract. Thus by a divine dispensation Swāmi Vijnānānanda came to be associated with every phase of this long-cherished project. In 1897 he was in the company of Swāmi Vivekānanda when the latter studied carefully the architecture of north-west India with a view to incorporating its best features in his proposed temple of Shri Rāmakrishna, so that it might be an epitome of Indian culture just as the Master himself embodied the realisation of the country's religious aspirations throughout the ages. It was Swāmi Vijnānānanda, again, who drew the original plan of the temple. It was everybody's heartfelt desire that the temple should be dedicated within the Centenary year; but the work dragged on, much to the disappointment of all. Swāmi Vijnānānanda was dismayed, for he knew that his days were numbered. At long last, on January 14, 1938, the temple was dedicated with elaborate religious rites, and the ashes of the Master laid in it by Swāmi Vijnānānanda. On the new altar was placed an image of the Master in Samādhi pose executed in white Italian marble by a reputed Calcutta sculptor, Mr. G. Paul. The completion of the front portion took some months more. Commenting on this structure, the Tenth General Report of the Mission says, "In point of beauty and grandeur as well as strength, it may be considered the most remarkable temple of its kind in Northern India. The actual cost of the temple and its allied constructions has exceeded the estimated cost of seven lakhs of rupees by another lakh, and although some part

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of it has been subscribed by the Indian devotees, there is still a deficit of Rs. 84,000." These were figures of the pre-War days, and some of the materials had been obtained at concession rates; the present figures would be at least four times as much.

The temple, facing south, is constructed in pinkish white Chunār stone. The sanctum has a shallow dome 60 feet up, and is connected by a closed vestibule with a prayer hall. As one enters from the south through the gate, presenting a horseshoe façade in the Buddhist style, over which rises a superstructure, tier upon tier, somewhat resembling a Gopuram of South India, with a height of 78 feet, one finds oneself in a long nave with an inner vault and balconies on three sides resting on two rows of stately pillars that separate it from the enclosed wings on the east and west—all of which is reminiscent of the caves at Kārlā. The windows and balconies of this hall and the arches around the sanctum recall the Rājput and Mogul styles of architecture; the pavilions suggest the usual Hindu temple in Bengal; and the central dome the renaissance type of European architecture. The ground plan of the prayer hall, with the vestibule and shrine placed one behind the other, gives the impression of a Christian cross. The rectangular white altar, curved in the middle like the Damaru (hour-glass shaped drum) of Shiva, is topped by a huge lotus, also white, in full bloom, all designed by the famous Indian artist Nandalāl Bose. The sanctum is roomy, airy and well-lighted, and except for the canopy over the image and the tapestry behind to make the image stand out from the white surroundings, it is practically devoid of any decoration, adding thus to the atmosphere of serenity and austerity befitting the ideal of total renunciation that Shri Rāmakrishna embodied. And yet, 112½ feet in height, the temple has about it a modern air of spaciousness that stands in striking con-

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trast with the usual stuffiness of its traditional prototype. It is surmounted by a large dome of exquisite proportions, over which are set an Āmalaka (Emblic Myrobalan) and a gold-plated pitcher of metal enclosing a powerful light. Eight other corner domes of smaller dimensions, but of similar design, placed in two tiers, together with pavilions encircling the main dome add to the picturesqueness of the whole edifice. Around the sanctum is a passage for circumambulation. Over the arches of this passage can be seen the stone representations of the nine planetary deities, as they are found around the shrines in Orissan temples. These too are after the design by Nandalāl Bose. The prayer hall is 152 feet long, 72 feet wide and 48 feet high; it has also two side doors on the east and west, and eighteen niches in its walls to put statuettes in. The total length of the whole structure is 233 feet from north to south. To the east of the temple is a lawn, beyond which is a narrow road and a line of somewhat uncommon trees; then another lawn up to a protective wall along the Ganges, which flows southward, washing the feet of three temples dedicated respectively to Swāmi Brahmānanda, the Holy Mother and Swāmi Vivekānanda.

Swāmiji had told Swāmi Vijnānānanda that although he would not live to see with his physical eyes the erection of the temple, yet he would do so from above. As Swāmi Vijnānānanda dedicated the temple, he felt that his illustrious brother was actually blessing the occasion from the higher regions where he was. Swāmiji had wanted the temple to represent the spirit of universal fellowship, and here stood a lofty dream actualised in stone for all to see, admire and be inspired by.

With 1938 ended a decade that resounded with a success on which the younger generation could congratulate itself; for it was the rising generation which planned

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and executed the various undertakings, though it always followed the elders whom Providence had spared to guide, advise and encourage it, and smooth for it the process of transfer of spiritual and administrative power. The passing generation was glad indeed that its dreams were coming true. Had not Swāmi Vivekānanda often anticipated in his soliloquies the advent of men who would appreciate and follow him even better than his own contemporaries? The older monks now felt re-assured that the Math and Mission were in able hands, and they knew that their time to depart was near at hand. And soon they began to leave the world in quick succession—alas, too quick for the third generation to have more than a passing glimpse of them. Bless those stalwarts who formed the rear-guard of a mighty spiritual army that had conquered the world for Shri Rāma-krishna to bequeath it as a trust to the present and succeeding generations! The year 1938 marked the line of demarcation between the old and the new.

The first to take leave, on December 2, 1932, was Swāmi Subodhānanda, who had all along been a Trustee, an ex-officio member of the Governing Body and for some time their Treasurer as well. But more than that, he was loved and sought after for his sweet temper, childlike simplicity, affectionate nature and inborn spirituality. During his closing years he undertook long tours, especially in East Bengal, initiating many a fortunate soul into the life of the Spirit.

Then came the turn of Swāmi Shivānanda, President of the Math and Mission, whose very presence was a benediction to all, and who even in his ripe old age of seventy-nine continued to instil faith into all and lead them along the spiritual path. Towards the end, he seldom attended to business affairs, applying his mind to those questions only that were brought to him for his consideration; for the rest he relied on the judgment

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of his juniors. On April 25, 1933, he had a stroke of thrombosis, which paralysed his right side and deprived him of speech. Continuing in that state for nearly ten months he passed away on February 20, 1934.

He was succeeded as President by Swāmi Akhandānanda on the 13th March. We met the Swāmi earlier as the initiator of the Mission's first famine relief work in Murshidābād and the originator of the Orphanage at Sārgāchhi. An ardent disciple of Shri Rāmakrishna and a staunch follower of Swāmi Vivekānanda, Swāmi Akhandānanda was yet original in many respects. A man of wide travel and vast experience as well as possessed of a retentive memory, he wrote his Bengali memoirs in a fascinating style, with subtle humour, mastery of detail and charming power of narration, made all the more pleasant by an admixture of spiritual conviction, fervour and assurance of achievement. A worthy successor to Swāmi Shivānanda, he revered the latter as his veritable elder brother in every respect. The Math and Mission expected much of him, and the lay devotees were delighted to have him as the head. But he preferred to spend most of his time outside Belur and chiefly at Sārgāchhi, the field of his lifelong labour. Besides, God did not spare him for long. He was brought to the Belur Math for treatment, alas too late, for he was snatched away by death the very next day, February 7, 1937. He occupied the honoured post of President for scarcely three years.

The last of the direct disciples of the Master to succeed to the Presidency was Swāmi Vijnānānanda, the election taking place on the 5th March, 1937. We have seen that he was the head of the Allahabad centre. From there he wrote an English translation of the *Devi Bhāgavata,* the *Brihad-Jātaka* and the *Surya-Siddhānta,* and a Bengali book on waterworks. He was elected Vice-

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President of the Order on the 5th April, 1934. Along with his love for God, he had his appreciation of the ethical values of worldly life also. For instance, when going to see the Congress at Kānpur in 1925, he commented, "Know that God is being worshipped where so many people gather for a good cause. To work in unison is also a form of divine worship. . . . At the least, something for the good of the country is being thought of there. The divine power expresses itself through unity. It seems that our country will rise once more." Since he was a staunch follower of Swāmiji, it was no wonder that Swāmi Vijnānānanda lauded organised effort, even though it was in the political field. Nor was it surprising that though he lived a quiet unostentatious life and hated publicity, yet when given the responsibility of Vice-Presidency, he was found to be a very energetic monk despite his age and failing health. He moved from place to place initiating a large number of people and advising the monks about their personal and administrative problems. Thus he visited such distant places as Colombo and Rangoon. When he became President, his health had declined so much that an active life of that kind was no longer possible. Still he went on quietly fulfilling his duty as the head of the organisation by talking to the monks and devotees about things spiritual, and shaping their lives in conformity with his Master's message.

By now the play was over. He had installed the Master in his beautiful temple at Belur, and there was nothing else for him to do. So the Lord drew him back to Himself on April 25, 1938. In his last days he was engaged in rendering the *Rāmāyana* into English, which task, however, remained incomplete.

Among the direct disciples of Shri Rāmakrishna, there now remained only Swāmi Abhedānanda. But at that time he had only a nominal connection with the

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Belur organisation, and he too soon became confined to his room because of infirmity, till he entered into Mahāsamādhi in September 8, 1939. With his passing, the first generation of monks who had founded the Rāmakrishna Order was wiped out, leaving the Movement and the world distinctly poorer.

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THROUGH NATIONAL CALAMITIES

(1939—1948)

On Swāmi Shuddhānanda's shoulders fell the mantle of spiritual ministration after the demise of Swāmi Vijnānānanda. The Swāmi had won the confidence of the elders by his diligence, bright memory, keen understanding, strict observance of rules and thoroughness in executive work. To the younger monks he was a frank and loving elder who could be approached any time and with any problem. He was well versed in the traditions of the organisation ; and his penetrating grasp of the subtle meanings of the scriptures was a wonder. As an Editor of the *Udbodhan,* the translator of Swāmi Vivekānanda's works and the organiser of the Vivekānanda Society of Calcutta for a number of years, he had won public esteem to a high degree. And in every respect he was a monk. So his installation as President on the 18th May, 1938, was hailed by all. Swāmi Virajānanda, who had been Secretary from 1934, was now elected Vice-President, and Swāmi Mādhavānanda, one of the three Assistant Secretaries, who had often officiated as Secretary, took up that post. A new and partially democratic process had already been adopted by the Trustees in the matter of selection of a new Secretary, who had by then become the chief executive of a large and growing organisation. The Monks' Conference of 1937 had advised the Trustees to consult the senior monks before appointing anyone to that responsible post. In the earlier decades this method was adopted only in the case of a new President ; and now the office of the Secretary—as also that of the

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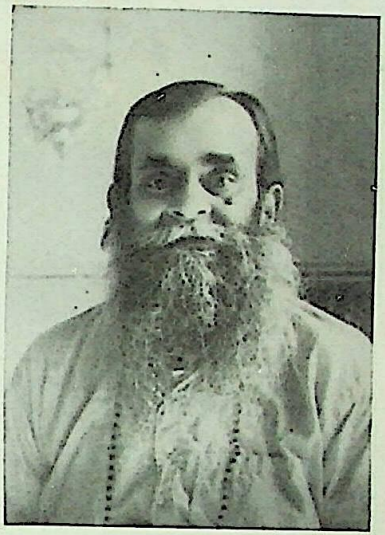
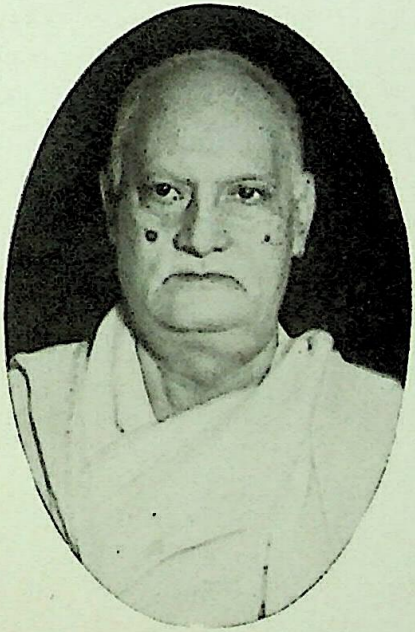
SWĀMI SHUDDHĀNANDA
(1872—1938)



SWĀMI VIRAJĀNANDA
(1873—1951)



SWĀMI SHANKARĀNANDA
(1880—)

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BELUR MATH: A PANORAMIC VIEW

SHRI RĀMAKRISHNA TEMPLE, BELUR

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Trustees—was subjected to the same preliminary consultation. As these recommendations had been accepted by the Trustees of the Belur Math, the new incumbent came to office with the goodwill and confidence of the senior monks as well as with the backing of the Trustees. But just when the organisation was entertaining the highest expectations of this combination of talent and spirituality represented by the new President, Vice-President and Secretary, Swāmi Shuddhānanda's health, which had never been good, declined rapidly; and he left the world after a brief illness on October 23, 1938.

Next in succession was his brother-disciple Swāmi Virajānanda, the Vice-President, who, as already mentioned, besides having his spiritual training at the feet of the Holy Mother, had served Swāmi Vivekānanda personally, and had long worked in the Math and Mission in various important capacities. All these qualifications marked him out as an outstanding personality. As a matter of fact, he proved to be a most successful President, whom God spared sufficiently long to leave his impress on the organisation and all its members, as also on innumerable lay devotees whom he initiated. He lived till 1951, though the first half of his regime was full of the calamities due to war, starvation and political instability. It was indeed a blessing for the organisation that it had at the helm such a cool and level-headed monk to direct its spiritual life during that critical period.

The reader has, however, to be reminded here, that by then the Math and Mission had developed far enough from the organisational point of view to make an effective separation between spiritual ministration and executive work, so that the President had become chiefly a constitutional head, while the Secretary, with the help of his assistants and under the general guidance of the Trustees and the Governing Body, discharged the

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administrative functions. Nevertheless, the President had many constitutional rights ; above all, his seniority, experience and position as the spiritual head made his position very weighty. Moreover, in the case of Swāmi Virajānanda, his personality made him a very powerful force in all the important affairs of the organisation.

On the assumption of the President's post by Swāmi Virajānanda, Swāmi Achalānanda stepped in as the Vice-President ; Swāmi Mādhavānanda continued as the Secretary ; Swāmi Shankarānanda became the Treasurer in place of Swāmi Vishuddhānanda, who was elected Accountant ; Swāmis Amriteshwarānanda, Ātmabodhānanda and Vireshwarānanda became the new Assistant Secretaries. On the whole, it was the regime of a younger generation.

Soon after assumption of office the new incumbents were called upon not only to face problems of internal growth and adjustment, but also those of national and even international import and magnitude. Of these, let us first put on record the happier incidents of growth, which will indicate that the organisation was then maintaining its vigour at a very high level so as not to be dismayed by the worst challenge of successive disasters that might befall a nation. We take up our thread from 1939 and run rapidly through the events up to 1945.

The year 1939 witnessed a new Mission centre at Lahore, and foreshadowed another, the Rāmakrishna Mission Vidyāmandira at Belur, which was to play a very big part in the educational sphere in future. Outside India, a Mission centre bade fair to spring up at Port Louis in Mauritius, as a result of Swāmi Ghanānanda's visit and stay there on the invitation of enthusiastic friends from July, 1939. In August of the same year, the Rāmakrishna-Vivekānanda Centre of New York moved to its five-storeyed permanent home in a residential section of the city at 17 East 94th Street.

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Successful extension work of the Vedānta Society of San Francisco, carried on for a number of years by Swāmi Ashokānanda at Oakland, led to the opening on the 22nd October, 1939, of a permanent centre in the adjacent University town of Berkeley, called the Vedānta Society of Northern California, East Bay Centre, which was later placed under the active charge of Swāmi Shāntaswarupānanda, who was sent to assist Swāmi Ashokānanda in March, 1948. Swāmi Yatishwarānanda, who had been carrying on his usual work in Central Europe and gradually extending it to other cities, went to Stockholm in August, 1939, on preaching work. But while he was there, the second World War broke out, followed by the invasion of Scandinavia by Hitler, which forced him to leave Europe for the U.S.A. in April, 1940. His was the last ship to leave Bergen before the occupation.

The year 1940 saw the incorporation into the Mission of the Rāmakrishna Vidyālaya and Boys' Home at Chingleput and the Rāmakrishna Āshrama at Salem. In the same year the centre at Port Louis, Mauritius, was placed on a permanent basis. The year also witnessed the death of Swāmi Paramānanda on the 21st of June, followed by the defection of his Western devotees along with his centres at La Crescenta, Boston and Cohasset. But the Rāmakrishna Movement could not remain unrepresented in Boston, where, among other things, Swāmi Vivekānanda earned his first laurels in the pre-Parliament days. So in April, 1941, another centre was started there under the leadership of Swāmi Akhilānanda. In March, 1942, the centre dedicated its own commodious house on Bay State Road, at Deerfield Street, situated on the Charles River in a very respectable quarter of the city, for which Mrs. Rasalia Abreu supplied the necessary funds.

In 1941 the proposed Vidyāmandira of Belur

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became an actuality under the newly constituted Rāmakrishna Mission Sāradāpitha of which the former, a residential Intermediate College, came to form only a section. With this Vidyāmandira the Mission entered a fresh sphere of educational activity, for till then its attention had been confined to education up to the High School standard. Another new-comer was the Rāmakrishna Mission Āshrama of Jalpāiguri in North Bengal. Still another addition was the Rāmakrishna Advaita Āshrama of Kalady, the birth-place of Shankarāchārya in Travancore. The Āshrama was started by Swāmi Āgamānanda in a garden-house on the bank of the river Purnā, on May 20, 1936, the birthday of Shri Shankara. Next month he opened a Sanskrit School, and with Kalady as centre he toured the whole State delivering the message of Shri Rāmakrishna to thousands of eager souls through his stirring speeches, for which he is noted. In 1937 he started a Gurukula, and in 1941 he took over a Harijan orphanage. The centre was handed over to the Rāmakrishna Math in February, 1941, from which year it began to grow rapidly. The Sanskrit School was developed into a High School and a Sanskrit Middle School in 1947, and a Home for college students was added in 1948.

The Rāmakrishna Āshrama of Māldā, existing from 1924, added a Mission branch in August, 1942. In December of the same year, Swāmi Yatishwarānanda, then in the U.S.A., started Vedānta work in Philadelphia. The Sevāshrama of Calicut was integrated with the Mission in May, 1943. Another new entrant in 1943 (April) was the Rāmakrishna Yogodyāna of Kānkurgāchhi, which was a significant fact. The place, it may be remembered, was a retreat built by Rām Chandra Datta, and a portion of the Master's ashes was interred there. Later a temple was built on the spot, which was completed in 1931. The temple and its properties were

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managed by the followers of Rām Chandra independently of the Belur authorities. Now with a view to ensuring permanence for the holy place, they handed it over to the Trustees of the Belur Math. Yet another addition in 1943 was the Rāmakrishna Mission Āshrama, a Students' Home at 18 Jadulāl Mullick Road, Calcutta, which was destined to make rapid progress. The Sāradā Kutir of Barlowganj came into existence in March, 1944, as a retreat for the monks, near Mussoorie.

A new Math centre, the Rāmakrishna Āshrama of Kālimpong, in the Darjeeling District of West Bengal, in the Himālayas, was added in April, 1944, to serve mainly as a retreat.

And all these years a fearful war was raging all over the world, into whose vortex India was dragged willy-nilly. Its repurcussions on the Math and Mission, almost everywhere, were immediate and devastating. We related how the fine work taking shape in Europe under Swāmi Yatishwarānanda was the first casualty. The Paris centre under Swāmi Siddheshwarānanda suffered a worse fate. As the invading armies advanced, the Swāmi moved southward from place to place, keeping in touch with his students, till in September, 1940, he settled at Montpellier in Southern France, to carry on his work as best he could under the circumstances. In Asia, the land and buildings of the Colombo Āshrama at Wellawatte, on the seashore, were commandeered by the military in 1942, and the monks had to remain elsewhere till 1946, when the military vacated the premises. Singapore fell to the Japanese, rendering communication with India impossible; and the Mission General Report for 1942-43 wrote laconically: "No information about the centre has been received after May, 1942." Swāmi Bhāswarānanda, it transpired later, lived there all along with the people, attending to their needs and serving them in all

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possible ways, which endeared him to them. But when the British reoccupied the Island, he became a suspect for supposed collaboration with the Japanese and the Indian army of liberation, since its great leader Subhās Chandra Bose, being a devotee of Swāmi Vivekānanda, visited the Singapore centre quite often. The result was that the Society's office on Norris Road was broken into by the military and thoroughly searched, and Swāmi Bhāswarānanda was imprisoned for sixteen days, after which he was released, and the papers seized were returned. The two centres at Rangoon suffered a terrible fate. The Sevāshrama was bombed and machine-gunned by the Japanese in December, 1941.[1] The subsequent events led to the closing of the work till normal times returned. The Mission Society at Rangoon also remained suspended during the war years. In India, almost all the centres suffered from the uncertainties of war. But the worst fate, for the time being, befell the Calcutta Students' Home, which was dislodged from its newly constructed structures, amidst rural peacefulness, to make room for the expanding aerodrome at Dum Dum close to the Mission premises. Nevertheless, the Home reopened its activities in July, 1942, at a small rented house in Calcutta, which had to be exchanged for a bigger one in 1943, and there it had to remain for over a decade till the Government paid sufficiently for its old premises to enable it to rehabilitate itself in its permanent home at Belghariā. The Vizagapatam Āshrama had to move in December, 1941, to the adjoining district for similar reasons. The old premises were reoccupied after the war ended; but by then a long period of uphill work had become a total loss. We have already referred to the handicap suffered by

[1] A Japanese radio broadcast stated that it had been done by mistake, and that they were sorry.

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the incipient T.B. Sanatorium near Rānchi owing to military occupation. The Rāmakrishna Math and the Mission Students' Home at Madras suffered many worries as a consequence of naval activities in the Bay of Bengal; the residential High School of the Home moved in March, 1942, to a place 53 miles away, and in May, 1946, to Ātur, near Chingleput, where it is still located. The Math also had to be removed partially elsewhere for a short period.

And now to turn from the woes of the Math and Mission to the dire fate of the people. At the advance of the Japanese, the vast majority of Indian settlers in Burma began trudging to India through forests and trackless, inhospitable hills, dying like flies on the way from thirst, starvation, fatigue and disease. With the enemy's planes buzzing overhead, the Mission workers went to the eastern frontiers of India to relieve the distress of these unfortunate people. Under the leadership of Swāmi Tyāgishwarānanda, they helped 3,230 evacuees in 1942 and 1943 with money, food and clothing, the total expenditure incurred being Rs. 70,000 approximately.

India was not an actual theatre of war; but as she was a base for the eastern front, the threat of Japanese invasion was there for a pretty long time, and the Indian army of liberation under Subhās Chandra Bose actually entered Manipur and the Nāgā Hills. These factors led to vigilance everywhere and strict control over all phases of life, to such an extent that when a dreadful cyclone and consequent tidal waves hit the coasts of Bengal and Orissa in October, 1942, washing away miles of human habitation and taking a heavy toll of life, the news took a considerable time to escape through the military iron curtain; and even when the people got an inkling of the disaster, its full magnitude remained unknown to

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those who could bring succour. At long last the nation knew enough to rise to a man to save their surviving sisters and brothers. The Mission was naturally in the forefront of this humanitarian work, which commenced in the last week of October, 1942 and continued up to June, 1944, during which period were distributed about 4,759 tons of food-stuffs, 64,000 pieces of cloth, and many more things besides. Medical aid was given to 23,000 persons. In addition 735 houses were built or repaired. The total number of persons helped was 60,280, and the total expenditure amounted to nearly Rs. 3,11,000.

Meanwhile, death was stalking the whole of fair Bengal. As the Japanese and the Indian National Army advanced, it seemed as though the British became nervous and secretly planned to evacuate the Bengal plains and fight from a more advantageous position behind the rugged country further west. In preparation for this, they wanted to carry out a "scorched earth policy," to deprive the enemy of every facility in the shape of food, means of communication, etc., that could help it in its forward push. But the Government, depending for the execution of its orders on some unscrupulous capitalists who had never been in these fields of business, commandeered or destroyed the boats, brought under strict vigilance all other means of transport, and purchased rice and paddy at prohibitive rates for immediate removal to far off places, and this when the import of rice had heavily declined. The result was dearth, destitution and death, not in hundreds or thousands, but in millions. Bengal lost in manpower in a few months perhaps more than the whole of Western Europe did during the entire war, devastating though it was in its fury. Modest estimates put the number of deaths at well above three millions. Believing that Calcutta had a better

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promise of food, many flocked there, to die in the streets faster than the corpses could be removed. Yet the Government would not call it a famine, lest they should be legally responsible for feeding the people according to their own "Famine Code"; they gave it the euphemistic name of "distress." The Mission too was obliged to use the term "Distress Relief" for the stupendous work it undertook at this juncture, although it was nothing less than a mortal mass struggle against Death itself in all its nakedness.

Along with other relief organisations, the Mission entered the field in June, 1943; and the work was formally closed in April, 1945. The total expenditure in cash amounted to nearly Rs. 11,66,500, in addition to goods worth about Rs. 25,00,000. At its peak, the Mission had 75 centres for distribution of help, spread over 19 districts and covering 1,169 villages and 22 towns, the total number of weekly recipients of doles for a long period being 1,28,972 at the end of 1943. The relief operation aimed at giving help in every possible way, for the people had neither any reserve of physical strength nor any means of sustenance. Besides, many families either disintegrated or got totally uprooted. Hence there were distribution centres for cash, food-stuffs, clothing, milk and medicine. Temporary test relief work also was resorted to for providing employment; and permanent rehabilitation work took the form of organising spinning, leather work and smithies as cottage industries, which saved many families from disruption.

Another valuable task accomplished by the Mission in 1943-44 in connection with this man-made famine was the administration of the Government Destitute Centre and the Government Orphanage in Nalin Sarkār Street, North Calcutta, where 21,000 men and women were collected, looked after and repatriated, and

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over 1,200 orphans were picked up, mostly from the streets of Calcutta, and provided with food and shelter.

To be brief, Society and Government did all they could, once they were conscious of the calamity. But, alas, the consciousness came rather too late! The measures that were taken succeeded only in saving the situation, already tragic, from becoming catastrophic. Even so, as the aftermath of the tragedy, Society was faced with a thousand problems, not the least baffling of which was the care of the orphans. Fortunately, at this critical hour, Shrimati Induprabhā Devi, widow of the late Satish Chandra Mukherjee, Proprietor, *Basumati,* Calcutta, made a munificent donation of Rs. 10,000 in cash and Rs. 3,00,000 in Government Securities. This together with two buildings, four gardens, some machinery, etc., left as a bequest by her husband at Raharā, 12 miles north of Calcutta, enabled the Mission to start in September, 1944, an orphanage called the Rāmakrishna Mission Boys' Home, with 37 boys, of whom 30 were destitute orphans. Soon the Government recognised the services of the Home and undertook to support more boys at the institution, so that the total strength rose to 158 at the end of 1945. The Mission could not accept more responsibility just then, since accommodation was insufficient.

We cannot close the period up to 1945 without referring to the good work that the Mission branch at Singapore continued to perform even under war conditions. In addition to its wonted work of teaching and preaching, the centre undertook various types of medical work. In 1945, there was a temporary hospital with 80 beds and two temporary outdoor dispensaries with a daily average of 50 patients. A Destitute Relief Camp also was maintained from September to December, where regular medical aid was rendered to 80 inmates.

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In addition, food and clothing were supplied to many more. At last the war ended, and peace returned.

As social, economic and political problems developed during all these years of stress and strain, demanding more and more service from the Math and Mission, and as work increased and became more complex, necessitating quick decision and execution at different places under varied circumstances, the constitutions and administrative machinery of the two organisations evolved accordingly. We alluded to certain important changes effected in the Math and Mission constitutions in 1937. The Mission constitution underwent some more important changes in 1946, though the line of development was not entirely different from what was implied in the 1937 Rules. One important change was the explicit provision for loans from the headquarters to the branches, and from one branch to another with the approval of the headquarters. This helped many institutions to grow quickly. As for loans from the Government, banks, or any other outside agency, the matter was left in the hands of the Association to decide. Another innovation was the designation of the Secretary at the headquarters as General Secretary to distinguish him from the branch Secretaries. He was also vested with more executive power. Still another change was the dropping of the headline "Bye-laws" over the section dealing with the branch centres, they too being henceforth guided by the "Rules," like the headquarters. The net result was to make the organisation an integrated whole. The branch Secretaries, who had been made the *de jure* executive heads of their centres in 1937, had by now come to occupy that position *de facto* through a practice adopted by the headquarters. The new Rules, therefore, did not touch on this point. The Local Committees of the branches now came to

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be termed Managing Committees, and the Chief Supervisor's post was abolished, his function having been taken over by the Inspectors and branch Secretaries under the 1937 Rules. According to the revised Rules, the fee for membership of the Mission was raised from Rs. 5 per annum to Rs. 12, and that for life-membership from Rs. 100 to Rs. 350.

Leaving aside these constitutional niceties, which did not directly affect the country, and coming to the more tangible facts of national history, we might expect a period of peace and happiness after the second World War. But Providence willed otherwise. The initial success of the Indian army of liberation, and the Non-co-operation movement—up to the non-payment of taxes—carried on relentlessly by the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Mahātmā Gāndhi, had put new faith and resolution in the national mind to fight the battle of freedom to a finish. Though the thoughtful among the rulers knew that they would ultimately have to leave India, yet the diehards among them wanted to retard Indian national progress by setting brother against brother. As a result, a demand for dividing India into two parts—Muslim and non-Muslim—began to be actively preached ; and to enforce this, a Muslim demonstration, with its natural consequence of bloodshed, for which the organisers might not have been directly responsible, was staged in Calcutta in August, 1946, by the Muslim Leaguers, who then controlled the provincial Government. Unfortunately, the Muslims had the worst of it, so they retaliated in East Bengal two months later. The District of Noākhāli suffered the most. Loot, arson, mass conversion, murder and other atrocities were let loose, and a great many isolated Hindu houses were burnt to the ground. Even small concentrations of Hindus had to leave their hearth and home. Normalcy was restored

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only after the military had intervened. But by then a whole community had been totally uprooted. The situation required both economic and moral rehabilitation, which duty the country woke up under Mahātmā Gāndhi's leadership to fulfil. The Mission too in its humble way entered the field, helping the sufferers to rebuild their houses, supplying them with food and agricultural implements, and encouraging them to restart their religious practices. Two students' homes were locally started to accommodate and educate 26 orphans ; and 55 more of them were absorbed by the permanent institutions of the Mission elsewhere.

Noākhāli, however, proved only the precursor of worse tragedies. The British Government granted independence to India in August, 1947, after splitting up India into Pakistan and India. The immediate result was more riots and more genocidal killing. So the Mission had to continue in the field for more than two years. Starting from October, 1946, the East Bengal Riot Relief and Rehabilitation work was carried on by the Mission at different times in the Districts of Noākhāli, Tippera, Sylhet and Dacca till December 31, 1949. The whole operation cost nearly Rs. 3,36,000.

A few months after the mass killing in the east, a similar or worse tragedy was enacted in the west in March, 1947 and subsequently, as a result of which almost all the non-Muslims left West Pakistan for India, and the Muslims of East Punjab migrated to West Pakistan. Some good came out of this total exchange, since the population moving either way could be settled in the lands and buildings vacated by the other community. Called to duty, the Mission hurried to serve the refugees gathered at Kurukshetra, about a hundred miles north of Delhi, where the Government had set up transit camps. In co-operation with the Government, the Mission started work in October, 1947, and carried it

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right up to the middle of 1948. Altogether 5,626 utensils and 15,401 blankets, pieces of clothing, etc. were distributed by the Mission, while the daily attendance at the milk canteens rose to 23,638 at its peak in March, 1948. At its medical relief centre, the daily attendance was 275. In this work, the Mission received from the Government and other sources nearly Rs. 62,400 in cash, in addition to a liberal supply of materials.

While the Mission had to face these indirect results of the vivisection of the country, its direct effect too was considerable. The Lahore centre had to be abandoned in August, 1947. The Āshrama at Karāchi "was thoroughly looted by Mohammedan hooligans on the 6th January, 1948. The inmates, however, were left untouched. Finding it impossible to continue the work, the authorities finally closed this very promising centre on the 9th August, 1948." Things in East Pakistan were a little better just then, for the migration of Hindus on a mass scale from there started somewhat later, and it proved to be a slow—and never-ending—process. It is calculated that up to December, 1956, more than four millions of Hindus have crossed the borders. Naturally, the blow to the Mission centres just after the partition was not as stunning as in West Pakistan, although it was heavily felt, and the suffering was more long-drawn. The East Bengal centres have not as yet come out of the woods. The first result of the partition was that the non-Muslim Government servants opted in a body for India and moved out bag and baggage. They were followed by the landed middle classes, who placed life and honour above properties left behind. Business also showed signs of migration from east to west. The westward movement gradually affected other classes, and sometimes whole areas became evacuated by the Hindus. Under such conditions, it was not an easy task for the Math

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and Mission to work effectively. They did their best all the while to allay fear and cement the bond of friendship between the two communities, though with little success. Nay, at times, the very existence of the Math and Mission in East Pakistan became a matter of conjecture. The centres and their workers seemed to be suspect in the eyes of those who counted in public affairs. The worst affected was the centre at Sylhet, which had subsidiary activities spread over the district. The place was once actually threatened by a mob standing at the gate. From this it was saved providentially. But the fine High School it was building up at Āgnā was burnt to ashes, and not rebuilt. Financial difficulty forced the centre to close down some more of its educational activities. To add to all this, one Mission worker was arrested and put behind prison bars for months on a charge of espionage, which, however, could not be substantiated before a court of law in Pakistan. All the same, the Mission had to spend much money and pass anxious days for him. Another monk was arrested, but released soon after. Others complained of being watched. To sum up the whole position, though the Math and Mission had no grudge against the Pakistani people and their Government, and though they had nothing to do with politics, yet the behaviour of some fanatics and some petty officers, at least in the early years, gave the impression that most of the Math and Mission workers were not wanted there. That was an unenviable position. Still out of humanitarian considerations, the Math and Mission decided, despite the heavy exodus of Hindus from all over the State, to continue the East Pakistan centres, curtailing work where possible and spending from their savings of past years, till things improved, as they were bound to do.

This brings us to the East Bengal Refugee Relief,

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which was conducted in two stages. The first phase started on May 17, 1948, and ended on March 16, 1949, with a short break in November, 1948. This work was carried on in co-operation with the West Bengal Government. As the communal riots spread, streams of Hindu refugees began to pour into India helter-skelter in a state of panic and extreme misery. It was a huge problem altogether beyond the capacity of the Mission, which, however, advanced to do its bit. Two Mission centres, the Boys' Home of Raharā and the Sāradāpitha of Belur, distributed about Rs. 8,60,000 among the refugees, the money being supplied by the Government. The maximum number of weekly recipients was 10,386. In addition, nearly 31,000 pieces of clothes and blankets and 183 tons of food-stuffs were given to the incoming destitute refugees. With the second phase of the Relief we shall deal later.

To resume the thread of our narrative, we find after 1944, the tempo of work was maintained even under the trying circumstances described above. In order to provide a retreat for the students of the Boston and Providence centres, the Sāradā Āshrama was inaugurated by Swāmi Akhilānanda on an extensive plot of land at Marshfield, about 30 miles south of Boston, on the Atlantic. After the return of peace in France, Swāmi Siddheshwarānanda came back to his old place at Saint Nandé, near Paris, to take up the strings of the Vedānta work from the middle of May, 1945. He delivered weekly lectures, attended mostly by University students. Of the two centres at Rangoon suspended because of the war, the Society was first reopened in June, 1946, to be followed by the Sevāshrama in January, 1947. It was easier to rehabilitate the Society than the Sevāshrama. Both had been damaged by bombing, but the hospital very much more so. Besides, the hospital was a greater responsibility.

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With the attainment of complete independence by Burma after the War, her attitude towards India and the Indians had to be ascertained; and many Indians who used to support the hospital with funds had left the country as a result of the troubles during and after the War. Hence the Mission had to proceed cautiously. But it soon became evident that the Burma Government was very friendly, and there still remained financial sources that could be successfully tapped. Hence after its restarting, the institution made rapid strides towards regaining its former stature. The number of beds in 1948 was 50, that of patients in the indoor department was 2,458, and that in the outdoor department 1,34,690, whereas the corresponding numbers were 148, 4,032 and 2,23,294 in 1955, as against 200, 6,575 and 3,65,471 respectively in 1941.

A very promising new-comer in June, 1946, was the Rāmakrishna Mission Vivekānanda College of Madras. To meet the growing need of college students who, though meritorious, found it extremely difficult to get admission anywhere under the prevailing system of distributing seats according to community alone, some leading citizens of Madras conceived the idea of founding this first grade college, in which admission would be regulated by merit and not community. They requested the Mission to sponsor the institution and entrusted to it the funds raised for this purpose. The Mission accepted the proposal and worked out the scheme with signal success from the very start with the help of the organisers themselves and other friends in the city.

In this connection we have to point out that, though we have been speaking very often of the actual management of Mission institutions by the monks, it was not, and is not even today, a universal custom. The exception is specially in evidence in the Madras

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State, where capable lay devotees, eager to co-operate with the Governing Body in the domain of education, have never been wanting. The result has been a wonderful growth, which the monks by themselves could scarcely achieve. Prominent among these institutions, in the Madras City itself, inclusive of the Vivekānanda College just mentioned, are the Rāmakrishna Mission Students' Home, the group of Girls' institutions called the Sāradā Vidyālaya and the Boys' Schools, Tyāgarāyanagar. In addition, we have the Vidyālaya at Perianāickenpālayam and the Vidyālaya and Boys' Home at Chingleput, both in Madras State. As the only instance of similar endeavour outside this State may be mentioned the schools at Jamshedpur, in Bihār, which till recently were managed by the lay devotees, composing the Vivekānanda Society. Of course, there are many Mission centres where the devotees and monks have worked in unison, and devotees have often been the chief executives in such undertakings.

That the growth of the Mission was achieved in many cases by the gradual expansion of each centre, rather than by a mere multiplication of numbers, is borne out by the phenomenal growth of the Rāmakrishna Mission Students' Home at Madras. Initiated only as a small orphanage, it soon became a full-fledged Students' Home with substantial buildings of its own. To this was added a residential High School and also a Technical Section, each an institution in itself. And then the Home addressed itself to the task of starting day schools of various grades. Thus a group of schools began to grow up in the Tyāgarāyanagar quarter of the city from the year 1932. In 1934, a hostel was added to them. This group of institutions gradually attained such magnitude that efficiency of management necessitated their being constituted in

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January, 1948, into a separate Mission centre, called the Rāmakrishna Mission Boys' Schools, Tyāgarāya-nagar, under a new Managing Committee. In 1948, the High School belonging to this group and located in its own spacious building, had with its branches 2,519 boys on the rolls; and the hostel had 75 inmates. Besides these, there were three Elementary Schools with a total strength of 1,169.

Similarly striking was the growth of the Sāradā Vidyālaya of Madras. It had in 1948 a High School with a strength of 1,175 girls, a Training School with 127 trainees for teachership in Elementary Schools, an Elementary School attached to it with 306 students and a separate Higher Elementary School with 691 students, in addition to a Montessori Section with 57 children. All these were served by two hostels accommodating 100 girls.

The year 1946 saw the happy realisation of a dream of Swāmi Vivekānanda. Half of the land of the garden-house at Cossipore together with the historic building in which the Master had passed his last months and trained his apostles, and which, in Swāmiji's opinion, was really the first monastery of the Order, was purchased in August, 1946, mainly through the munificence of a Calcutta friend. The other half, consisting of vacant land, was also secured in April, 1949. So the garden-house at 90 Cossipore Road was reinstated in its pristine glory, and it soon began to draw numbers of devoted pilgrims.

The year 1947 witnessed the fruition of a similar effort at Kāmārpukur, the birth-place of Shri Rāmakrishna. The Order had it very much in its heart to preserve the Master's memory adequately. As early as December 14, 1917, Swāmi Sāradānanda had secured a plot of land contiguous to the ancestral home of the Master, with a view to erecting some

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memorial structure. And next year, on July 27, the Holy Mother along with the other co-sharers had gifted away to the Trustees of the Belur Math the little patch of land sanctified by the Master's nativity. As nothing substantial could be built on that tiny bit of land without getting possession of the land and cottages surrounding it, negotiation had to be carried on with the family from time to time without any hope of success. On the contrary, the proprietors pitched their demand higher and higher every time, notwithstanding the fact that their forbears had agreed at the intercession of the Holy Mother to vacate the cottages whenever the Math authorities would be in a position to build for them more substantial houses elsewhere in place of the existing ones, or would give them adequate compensation to do so by themselves. As the generation-old negotiations failed, and the monks of the Belur Math feared that the proprietors might be induced to sell the land and houses privately to some other party, they moved the Government to acquire the houses on behalf of the Rāmakrishna Mission, to be maintained by it as a national memorial. That the Math and Mission were not acting on baseless suspicion is proved by the fact that even while they were trying for the acquisition of the Cossipore garden-house through the Government, another party accidentally got scent of it and forthwith purchased it, so that the Math had to buy it out for a heavy sum. Rumour had it that the same people were bidding privately for Kāmārpukur as well. Anyhow, the Government acquired the property for the Mission in March, 1947, and in the next month a combined Math and Mission centre was started there. The owners of the property received its market price plus the usual compensation. None the less, out of respect for the family, the Belur authorities paid it

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additional sums, and rebuilt the cottage of the family deity Raghuvira with brick and concrete.

There were new developments in other fields. Swāmi Shrivāsānanda had created in 1938 a trust called the Holy Mother's Trust, Mysore, with a corpus valued at Rs. 1,00,000, from the income of which the Trustees of the Belur Math were to provide, among other things, for the training and support of Sannyāsins and Brahmachārins of the Order in or from the Kannādā country as also outside. The Swāmi himself experimented with his scheme by opening a small Vedānta College, which for various reasons had to be shifted from place to place. After his death, the Math authorities carried on the work for a while at Bangalore, whence it was removed in May, 1947, to Mangalore in South Kanara, which place was selected for the permanent Āshrama under the Trust. Here the Āshrama and the College worked under the same roof for a while, till the latter was abolished for want of sufficient students.

After the withdrawal of troops from the site selected near Rānchi for the Tuberculosis Sanatorium, construction work was resumed in 1947, although the progress was slow in view of the huge amount required to give a decent start to such an undertaking.

One notable incident of 1947 in the U.S.A. was the purchase, in December, by the Rāmakrishna-Vivekānanda Centre of New York, of the historic cottage at Thousand Island Park where Swāmi Vivekānanda had lived in 1895 for seven weeks to give intensive training to some Western students, out of which came the *Inspired Talks*. After remodelling, it was dedicated as an Āshrama in July, 1948.

By the end of 1947 the Mission attained a definite stage in its development; during the succeeding decade it did not practically sponsor any new and permanent centre. The three seeming exceptions were the Rāma-

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krishna Math at Rajahmundry in the East Godāvari District, the Mātribhavan in South Calcutta and the centre at Srinagar, Kāshmir. The Rajahmundry centre was the outcome of an old and oft-repeated offer of land and buildings from a munificent local devotee. The case of the Mātribhavan too was similar. It sprang out of a generous legacy left by Mr. R. P. Roy, who died in April, 1941. Owing to prolonged litigation, the property was handed over to the Mission by the Official Trustee in February, 1948. As for the Srinagar centre, it was started experimentally, on representation from an influential quarter, in May, 1954, and then closed down in April, 1956. This avoidance of new undertakings did not, however, mean that the Mission ceased to grow. Far from it; the progress was even more rapid and striking than in earlier years, with this difference that the attention was now fixed on internal growth in a more deliberate way. The new method consisted in building more substantial houses for existing activities, which were spontaneously increasing, and starting auxiliary institutions. We referred to such a process more than once, and illustrated it by citing in particular the educational institutions at Madras and other places. What we mean to emphasise here is that the process gathered momentum owing mainly to the encouragement of the national Government. This is an interesting study; and it will repay our labour to look into the process a little more closely.

The General Report of the Mission for 1936-37 records: "Under the Headquarters at Belur there were in 1937, 26 Mission centres, 17 combined Math and Mission centres and 26 Math centres in India. These were distributed as follows: 31 in Bengal, 3 in Assam, 6 in Bihār, 2 each in Orissa, Bombay and Mysore, 11 in U.P., 1 each in Delhi, C.P., Sind, Cochin, Coorg and Travancore, and 6 in Madras.

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In addition to these, there were 2 centres in Burma, 4 in Ceylon, 1 each in Straits Settlements, England, France, Switzerland and Argentina, and 11 centres in the United States of America. Thus there were altogether 50 Mission centres and 58 Math centres at the end of 1937. Moreover, attached to these branch centres there were no less than 9 sub-centres where monastic workers resided more or less permanently."

A decade later we read in the Report for 1946-47: "Along with the Headquarters at Belur there were, in 1947, 40 Mission centres, 20 combined Math and Mission centres and 31 Math centres in India. These were distributed as follows: 38 in Bengal, 7 in Bihār, 4 in Assam, 14 in Madras, 12 in U.P., 3 each in Orissa and Travancore, 2 in Mysore, and 1 each in Coorg, Cochin, C.P., Delhi, Punjab, Sind, Bombay and Kāthiāwār. In addition there were 2 centres in Burma, 1 each in Ceylon, Fiji, Mauritius, England, France, Straits Settlements and Argentina, and 12 centres in the United States of America. Thus there were altogether 65 Mission centres and 67 Math Centres in 1947. Moreover, attached to the branch centres there were 12 sub-centres where monastic workers resided more or less permanently." The two summaries differ substantially in point of number.

As compared with this big jump in one decade, in the General Report published in 1954, we have, "Thus there are altogether 69 Mission Centres and 65 Math Centres." The same Report put the sub-centres at 10. That is to say, there were altogether 117 centres and sub-centres at the end of 1937, as compared with 144 at the end of 1947 and the same number at the end of 1953.

So far about the number of centres. Let us now look at the volume of work turned out. Of the three Reports under scrutiny, the earliest one tells us:

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"Thus in 1937, there were 9 Indoor Hospitals which accommodated 9,320 patients, 43 Outdoor Dispensaries which treated 13,12,614 patients, . . . 31 Āshramas accommodating 761 students, 3 Residential High Schools with 338 boys, 9 other High Schools with 2,379 boys and 869 girls, 5 Industrial and Agricultural Schools with 492 boys, 5 Middle English Schools with 401 boys and 89 girls, 57 Upper and Lower Primary Schools with 3,049 boys and 1,352 girls, 18 Night Schools with 632 students. . . ."

The 1947 Report states, "In 1947, there were 9 Indoor Hospitals which accommodated 13,516 patients, 60 Outdoor Dispensaries which treated 14,26,518 patients, . . . There were 47 Āshramas accommodating 1,931 students, 2 Colleges with 1,020 boys, 26 ordinary Secondary Schools and 3 Residential Schools with 6,019 boys and 4,597 girls, 4 Industrial Schools and 8 Vocational and Agricultural sections attached to other schools with 914 students, 16 Middle Schools with 2,202 boys and 1,403 girls, 61 Upper and Lower Primary Schools with 6,952 boys and 3,589 girls, 16 Night Schools with 585 students, . . ."

Lastly, the 1953 Report records: "In 1953, there were 12 Indoor Hospitals which accommodated 16,530 patients, and 61 Outdoor Dispensaries which treated 21,76,940 patients, . . . In 1953, 2,601 boys and 233 girls were accommodated in 44 Students' Homes. Two Colleges had on their rolls 1,558 students. . . . There were 31 High Schools with 9,738 boys and 3,680 girls, and 85 Lower Grade Schools with 12,728 boys and 3,480 girls. . . ."

Thus, even if we leave aside the other types of educational institutions, libraries, cultural activities and preaching, and do not bore our readers with more statistics, it can be safely asserted that our contention that at this stage the Math and Mission began to evolve

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by internal growth rather than by multiplication of numbers is amply proved.

To make a survey of the types of work that the Mission had developed up to the end of 1948, we are already familiar with the hospitals and outdoor dispensaries, which served people in India and abroad without distinction of caste, creed, or colour. In addition to the big institutions of this category, almost every centre had a modest establishment helping people with homoeopathic medicines; the bigger institutions, of course, generally used allopathic medicines, though these were often supplemented by homoeopathic and Āyurvedic medicines.

The next category of institutions comprised the general schools of various types, colleges for general study, vocational and industrial schools (teaching various subjects from carpentry, tailoring, etc., to electricity, automobile engineering, etc.), training schools and colleges for nurses and teachers, orphanages, students' homes and residential schools, and Sanskrit schools.

It was Swāmi Vivekānanda's earnest desire to work for the uplift of the women and the masses. The Mission did its utmost in these fields as well. We have seen that by 1948, the Mission had developed quite a number of educational institutions exclusively for girls and women teachers, in which vocational subjects were also introduced. Besides, there were some maternity centres serving expectant mothers, in addition to women's sections in indoor hospitals run exclusively by women.

The Mission tried to establish contact with the masses by building up many of its institutions in rural areas, some of which catered for the villagers alone. There were also night schools and educative tours with magic lanterns and gramophones. For the hill tribes

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there were permanent institutions like those in the Khāsiā and Jaintiā Hills and elsewhere. About these various kinds of activities for the uplift of the labouring and backward classes, we learn from the General Report for 1947-48, that there were 150 activities of different types under this category, in addition to the occasional preaching tours.

Regarding relief work we have given the reader some ideas ; we cannot afford to enter into more details. The foreign work too does not require any fresh introduction ; for almost all of it is by now quite familiar. And these followed their wonted line of work.

A few words need to be added about the spiritual and cultural work. For the sake of convenience, we quote from the General Report for 1947-48: "The Math and Mission centres, particularly the former, laid special emphasis on the dissemination of the spiritual and cultural ideas and ideals of the Hindus, and through various types of activity tried to give a practical shape to the teaching of Shri Rāmakrishna that all religions are true. The centres established real points of contact between people of different denominations through public celebrations, meetings, classes, publications, etc." Over and above conducting libraries, reading rooms and Sanskrit schools, some Math centres published books on religious subjects, and six magazines in different languages. The Math centres at Māyāvati, Calcutta, Madras, Nāgpur and Mysore in particular had to their credit a considerable number of useful publications in different languages. Special mention should also be made of the Institute of Culture in Calcutta, which tried to bring eminent men and women of India and other lands into cultural fellowship.

This then is a sectional representation of the activities of the Math and Mission as they stood on the

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verge of great events following the country's attainment of independence in August, 1947.

Before closing the chapter, however, we have to refer to two great losses that the organisation sustained. Swāmi Amriteshwarānanda, one of the Assistant Secretaries and a very able administrator and sincere worker of the Math and Mission who had put forth a good deal of constructive work, died prematurely on the 26th March, 1946. Next year, Swāmi Achalānanda, the Vice-President, passed away on the 11th March. He was a disciple of Swāmiji and was one of the builders of the Rāmakrishna Mission Home of Service, Benares, where he spent his closing years, imparting spiritual instruction to the younger monks and the lay devotees. The Vice-President's post was now jointly occupied by Swāmis Shankarānanda and Vishuddhānanda, and Swāmi Nirvānānanda stepped in as the Treasurer. Another change took place in March, 1947. After sounding the general opinion of the organisation, Swāmis Abhayānanda, Dayānanda, Sambuddhānanda, Shāshwatānanda, Pavitrānanda and Gambhirānanda were appointed Trustees—and members of the Governing Body.

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UNDER INDEPENDENCE

(1949—1953)

Independence came on the 15th August, 1947. But the early months kept the people so busy with the settlement of communal wrangles, the housing of refugees and the making up of shortage of the bare necessities of food and raiment, that they had no time to turn their minds to constructive programmes. The British administrators had done much for the good of India. But they had done very little for the masses. They had only skimmed the surface for their own economic benefit and political stability; they had thought as little as was convenient about the lower levels of society, leaving them to the care of petty merchants, industrialists, professionals and landowners —all in their own leading strings. There were, therefore, poverty and squalor, disease and death, ignorance and superstition galore everywhere. It was no easy task for the national Government to show any tangible result even in a few years, not to speak of months.

Whatever the immediate result may have been, the people were glad that independence had come at last. The British, finding it too hot for them, gracefully walked out while it was still possible to retain the friendship of India by that gesture of goodwill. Thus was fulfilled the prediction of Swāmi Vivekānanda that India would be liberated in an inconceivable way; and thus came freedom, which, according to Swāmiji, was the precondition of real growth for any country. By an undying vitality, India had survived hundreds of years of foreign occupation; and now independence

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afforded her an infinite scope for planned development along her own lines. Naturally, with all the hindrances besetting her on every side, the growth could not be spectacular. Still the main condition of freedom being guaranteed, India could now advance with firm, confident steps. And as she progressed, the Rāmakrishna Math and Mission extended their fields of activity also. Through storm and stress the twin institutions had stood by the nation, and now the nation proceeded with faith to entrust them with greater responsibilities. In fact, as the nation pressed forward, the demand on the Mission became so great, and the wherewithal of service became so readily available, that the Mission often found it impossible to fulfil all the expectations and profit by most of the opportunities. After all, the Mission could not suddenly outgrow itself; it had its own ideology, method of work and standard of efficiency. Governmental help had, therefore, to be taken with a little discrimination.

In this connection, one point has to be noted in particular. The Mission had up till then flourished mostly on private charity, though non-recurring help from the Government had often been accepted, and this most generally during the concluding years of British rule, when a semi-national Government functioned, and the Mission had no misgivings about accepting such help. With independence the pattern of contribution changed a little. Private help still continued to play an important part, and perhaps it increased in volume. But relatively speaking, Governmental aid came into greater and greater prominence. The policy of the Government was not a little responsible for this change. With greater emphasis on a socialistic pattern of society, and the nationalisation of land and some of the key industries, private charity became somewhat shy. And a higher rate of taxation

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on the upper brackets of income tended heavily to retard prospective big donations. Still Government help more than compensated any loss incurred in this changed environment. Besides, its quickly adopted policy of exempting donations within certain limits to the Rāmakrishna Math and Mission from the income-tax did much to improve the situation.

As a corollary to this national support, and a tangible proof of the friendship of the Math and Mission for all sections of the people, the authorities at Belur decided in 1952 not to take part in any election. It had been a settled policy with them even during the British days not to stand or vote in any election, municipal, provincial, or Indian. They felt it necessary to reiterate that policy even in the altered context of national independence. This step aimed not only at keeping the institutions free to all people in the spheres of religion, education and philanthropy, but also protecting the monks from party alignment and political bickerings. Their belief in the universal brotherhood of man and immanence of the one God everywhere in every country could not but lead to this voluntary limitation of their political rights. Practical considerations too led to the same conclusion. In the same monastery, there lived monks hailing from different parts of India and even outside India, who could be called upon at any moment to proceed to any part of the world for service irrespective of provincial or national boundaries. Under such circumstances nobody could afford to be parochial in his ideas; he had to be universal in his outlook without being apathetic to national progress. Political alignment might promise immediate success, but higher considerations required the avoidance of this lure for the sake of more lasting achievement.

To assess the full working capacity of the organisation, one has to take into account all these factors, and

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along with that its manpower. Starting only with sixteen monks—the direct disciples of Shri Rāmakrishna—the organisation could boast of only thirty-five monks and thirty-five Brahmachārins up to 1912. On the eve of independence, this number must have multiplied at least eight times. Besides, the insistence on higher educational qualifications and admission at a comparatively young age must have raised the working potentiality of the Math and Mission. But there were other factors to counterbalance this gain. First, the work increased apace. Secondly, we hinted earlier that not all monks had the same zest for work ; following the monastic tradition, a fairly large number spent their days without routine engagements. Thirdly, there were some defections. Fourthly, as the organisation grew older, many monks had to retire from work owing to age or disease ; and as it happens everywhere, the pioneers work harder than their successors ; so the death or retirement of a pioneer requires more than one to replace him. Lastly, we mentioned that the centres had become concentrated in certain areas, so that vast stretches remained uncovered, where the organisation could not function adequately. By a concurrence of events into which we do not want to probe, the monks hailed mostly from Bengal and South India—particularly Malabār, Tamil Nād, and Kanara. The Math and Mission centres are therefore to be found generally in those areas. An exception is Uttar Pradesh, which possesses a large number of centres, though scarcely any monks have come from there. It must be mentioned, however, that more monks are now joning from other provinces, especially, Orissa, Andhra, Mahārāshtra, etc.

With this background presented in brief, we proceed to two of the best chapters of our history. We shall come to the institutions after finishing with some

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temporary relief works. Of these, again, we shall first take up one in which the co-operation of the Mission with the Government reached its maximum, and which, again, is illustrative of the cautiousness of the Mission against getting involved in party politics. We allude to the East Bengal Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Work started in 1950.

We referred earlier to a similar relief operation that was necessitated by the heavy migration from East Bengal in consequence of fratricidal violence. As there was a lull in 1949 owing to strong measures taken by the Government to check the unruly elements, the exodus seemed to stop for a while. So the Mission had a respite. But in 1950 East Bengal politics took a new turn, and in spite of the assurances of the Government that the minority community would be protected and receive equality of treatment, that fear of the Hindus was not allayed. The recrudescence of riots, economic pressure and social ignominy in East Bengal combined with the prospect of a more solvent and honourable life in India, led to such a heavy rush for evacuation at all cost that the West Bengal Government and people stood aghast at the colossal problem that unexpectedly raised its head. All voluntary organisations, existing or formed on the spur of the moment, were mobilised to make arrangements for the reception, feeding and lodging of thousands upon thousands. The Mission entered the field in the middle of March, 1950. The main work for the Mission at the beginning was to feed the people, the cost of food and transport being borne by the Government and that of administration by the Mission. First they started feeding about 12,000 refugees daily at the Sealdah railway terminus in Calcutta, the food being cooked at the Belur Math and conveyed in lorries to the railway platforms. Gradually, as the exodus gained further momentum, and public

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contributions became available, the Mission extended its activities by opening nineteen centres on its own account as also in co-operation with the local and central Governments, in other places in the States of West Bengal, Bihār, Assam, Tripurā and East Bengal. Through these centres were distributed 10,76,182 meals, almost half of these being at the Sealdah Station. In addition, 1,69,848 persons were given medical aid, of whom 30,058 children were also supplied with diet. In 1951 the Mission distributed from the headquarters 1,360 lbs. of multi-purpose food, Rs. 14,508 and Rs. 4,304 as pecuniary and educational help respectively, besides Rs. 4,743 for blankets.

While on this topic, it has to be stated that though this service of the Mission was being appreciated by the Government and the people in general, and though the Mission would have much liked to continue this humanitarian work, some political and other considerations cropped up to embroil the Mission unnecessarily with the innocent public. The political parties could not agree amongst themselves about the right method of tackling the refugee problem, and it was hinted that the Government was trying to use the Mission to shield its real or supposed inefficiency. It was also rumoured that the Mission was hampering all remedial measures by its presence. The Mission had entered the field from a purely philanthropic point of view; but when this became mixed up with party politics, and charges and countercharges began to be hurled publicly, the Mission thought it wiser to follow an independent course, though thereby its capacity to work became very much crippled. Another reason for the Mission's stepping aside was that after the first few weeks of initial unpreparedness, the Government itself organised its resources well enough to take full charge of the situation.

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This was with regard to the reception, feeding and first accommodation of the refugees. The problem of rehabilitation too could not remain free from diverse extraneous complications, political and other. At one stage, the Mission seriously planned to rehabilitate the refugees with the help of the Government in places far away from Bengal. But just then, for various reasons, the refugees living in camps outside Bengal deserted these and came back to West Bengal; and their stand was openly vindicated by some prominent leaders. Thus the whole question of rehabilitation outside the Bengali-speaking areas became a subject of interminable political squabble, importing into it an amount of uncertainty about the course to be followed. As a result, the Mission decided not to take the refugees very far away, but to rehabilitate them in the states bordering East Pakistan. Accordingly it selected certain areas in West Bengal, Tripurā, and Assam, where 2,907 families were supplied with land and houses in 1950 and 1951.

Another commendable piece of work that the Mission turned out in 1951 was the efficient distribution of 40½ tons of wheat donated by the Indian Flood Relief Committee of New York, U.S.A., and 63 tons of wheat contributed by the Indian Chamber of Commerce, Suva, Fiji, among the flood-stricken people of 46 villages in the various districts of Bihār.

Still another evidence of the good result attainable by the co-operation of the Government and non-official organisations like the Rāmakrishna Mission was the Sundarban Famine Relief, when during the last seven months of 1952, the Mission distributed 346 tons of coarse wheat flour supplied by the West Bengal Government, in addition to 5,179 lbs. of multi-purpose and other foods and 10,755 pieces of cloth received from other sources.

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In addition to the above relief works organised mostly from the headquarters at Belur, the branch centres too proved their worth and readiness whenever the occasion demanded. Of these, we may mention the extensive Famine Relief work in the Cuddapah, Anantapur, Kurnool and Chittoor Districts of Royalaseema, Madras, which was undertaken jointly by the Mission Branch at Madras and the Rajahmundry Math of Andhra from March, 1952 to February, 1953. Some 300 tons of rice and wheat, vast quantities of skimmed milk (mostly powdered) and Multi-vitamin tablets, 31 bales of cloth and blankets, etc.—all received as gifts—were distributed among the needy along with other foodstuffs purchased, water, fodder for cattle, etc. The cash expenditure for this work amounted to Rs. 4,52,646. Then came the Flood Relief work in East and West Godāvari of Andhra, also carried on by the Rajahmundry centre. On the fateful night of August 15, 1953, the surging waters of the Godāvari broke the banks to inundate the lands on either side, bringing devastation and acute suffering to hundreds of thousands. The centre's own premises in the Rajahmundry town were under six feet of water for more than a week. Undismayed, the Mission started the very next day a feeding centre in its elevated garden at a short distance, where the number fed rose to five thousand a day. The Editor of the *Andhraprabhā* came to the Mission's aid with promise of funds to be collected through the paper. The entire sum of Rs. 4,70,701 thus realised was handed over to the Mission, which got another Rs. 1,00,500 from the Governor's Fund and Rs. 35,000 from the I.L.T.D. Company, the other collections being Rs. 81,320. The whole amount was spent for distribution of food, clothes, utensils, mats and cots, and for education and housing, the work lasting for about a year and a half.

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Without going into the various other relief operations undertaken by the Mission during this period, we may conclude by saying that independence and the reorganisation of India as a welfare state brought to the Mission not less, but greater responsibility and more scope for work in this field. The same was the case with the permanent institutions also. Here, again, we cannot deal with all of them, and have to be satisfied with typical cases only.

To take up one of the oldest institutions, the Rāmakrishna Mission Home of Service, Benares. The centre woke up to the need of modernising, at great cost, all its departments. In 1948 a building with an operation theatre, dispensing room, etc. for women patients was opened. In 1951 two X-ray units were set up; and in 1953 a new building was constructed for housing the Diathermy, Infra-red, and Ultra-violet equipment. In 1953 the Home had 115 beds in the indoor departments for men and women; 25 beds in the Refuge for Invalid Men; 50 beds in the Refuge for Invalid Women. It ran an outdoor dispensary attached to the main hospital and another a mile off at Shivālā, started in 1931. The medical staff was greatly strengthened by enlisting the honorary services of some local experts and the appointment of other resident physicians. The Home has still to make up much leeway. In 1953, 2,753 patients were treated in the indoor department, and 3,45,375 in the outdoor. Moreover, it distributed regular help to poor people in the city.

The Sevāshrama at Kankhal also exerted itself vigorously to catch up with modern times. The Government of Uttar Pradesh completed for it in 1953 the laying of water mains with a 15,000-gallon overhead tank, underground drainage, bathrooms, etc., at a cost of Rs. 1,40,000. The centre also received

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an X-ray plant as a gift. Moreover, a bathing ghat on the main Gangā Canal and a block for guests were completed. The indoor department worked with 50 beds.

In addition to the indoor departments for general diseases, the Sevāshrama at Vrindāban started an eye hospital in 1943, which with private and State patronage earned a very good name for itself and proved a boon to that region. The centre added an X-ray department in 1948. The indoor department treated 1,992 cases and the outdoor 1,35,065 in 1953. But being situated on the bank of the Jamunā, the Sevāshrama occasionally suffers from flood and erosion, to avoid which it acquired in 1951 a big plot of land on the Mathurā Road, measuring about 23 acres, to which it will be shifted after the necessary structures are raised. The project is being delayed for want of funds.

Turning to another State, Bihār, we find that the Sanatorium-Hospital at Dungri, Rānchi, which remained in a state of suspended animation during the years of war, restarted in 1951 its uphill task of translating into brick and mortar its dream of a modern T.B. Hospital, which is one of the costliest in the field of medical service. The Bihār Government and the Central Government responded with their contributions, which enabled the institution to begin functioning on a very modest scale. Subsequently, a princely donation by a Calcutta gentleman, who desires to remain incognito, enabled the institution to expand its activities and work in a really efficient way. This attracted the attention of both the public and the Government, as a result of which more funds came, so that the Sanatorium with its 101 beds soon occupied a recognised position among the Tuberculosis hospitals in the country, particularly because along

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with the medical side, the surgical side of treatment there reached a highly developed state.

Except for the two maternity hospitals in Calcutta —the Shishumangal Pratishthān and the Mātribhavan —the Mission was unable to found any other institution of that type. All the same, the Pratishthān flourished mostly with popular support to become a first-class maternity hospital with 150 beds, the admissions to them in 1953 being 4,671, and the attendance at the outdoor department, 22,663.

The Mātribhavan began humbly in the last quarter of 1950 with 10 beds, but soon raised the number to 16, half of which were free. It is waiting for a bigger future. A special feature of this institution is that, except for the resident medical officer, all others in charge of it are women workers, some of whom have dedicated their lives to the cause of the Mission.

We have perforce to avoid going into details about the outdoor dispensaries spread all over India, the biggest concentration being in the Uttar Pradesh. Of the outdoor departments of the big hospitals, in which sphere the Benares Home of Service easily led in 1953, we wrote earlier. Among the purely outdoor dispensaries, we should take special note of the one at Lucknow with its allopathic and homoeopathic systems of treatment and separate departments for various ailments. In 1953 it treated 1,64,757 cases. Here we should also refer to the outdoor dispensary at Bombay, which has a fine building and had in the same year an attendance of 2,32,225 at its allopathic, homoeopathic and Āyurvedic sections. The centre also maintained a hospital with 15 beds which was started experimentally in 1951, and which treated 322 cases in 1953. The Delhi T.B. Clinic, located since August, 1948, in its spacious three-storeyed building in Karolbāgh, is provided with a laboratory fitted with the latest

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equipment for clinical and bacteriological work. It treated 60,668 cases in 1953, while its 24 observation beds accommodated 327 patients. Under its home treatment scheme, Health Visitors and doctors were deputed to educate suspects about health rules and to give treatment to those unable to attend the Clinic in person. In addition to this, the Delhi centre conducted another general dispensary at the Āshrama premises, where the number of patients in 1953 was 44,141.

While on this study of sample cases, it will not be out of place to observe that a common feature of almost all the Mission institutions is their achievement of the best possible result with the least possible expenditure. This is attributable partly to the honorary services offered almost everywhere by local practitioners, though this is now supplemented by salaried service wherever constant attendance is needed, or where the smallness of the locality precludes such voluntary aid. Moreover, this economy—as also the efficiency—often results from the personal care taken by the monks. In many of the hospitals, the monks act not only as administrators, but also as nurses, compounders, dressers and doctors. And because of the presence of these monks, who, accepting their duties as service to God, attend personally to details and bestow their sympathy on all, however lowly their place in society, or whatever be their caste or creed, the patients feel quite at home in these institutions, which fact explains the comparatively large attendance at them.

With this cursory glance at a few representative institutions of medical service, we turn to educational institutions, which, by a fortuitous combination of circumstances, have cropped up mostly in West Bengal, Bihār, Madras and Travancore-Cochin in India, and in Ceylon and Singapore outside India. A consider-

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able amount of work is carried on in other States as well; but as success has been more conspicuous in these few places, we shall rivet our attention on them only.

The Rāmakrishna Mission Sāradāpitha of Belur had a brilliant record of progress. It entered into various fields of education, and maintained its tempo of growth. The residential Intermediate College, teaching some 250 boys, became well-known in West Bengal for its discipline and uniformly brilliant results in University examinations. In fact, it completely demonstrated the ancient theory, preached anew by Swāmi Vivekānanda, that education required a certain aloofness from the din and bustle of cities and a more loving association with the teachers to produce the best possible effects. It can be remarked in passing that the same kind of success was in evidence in the residential High Schools of the Mission in both North and South India. A second section of the Sāradāpitha was the Shilpamandira, started in 1942, which imparted free training for a period of one to three years to deserving students in such subjects as electrical engineering, auto-mechanics, electro-plating, general mechanics, carpentry, weaving and tailoring. With this section had been amalgamated in April, 1945, the erstwhile Rāmakrishna Mission Industrial School of Belur. The recurring expenses for this section were met mostly by the Government. But public contribution also was quite considerable, the most noteworthy being a sum of nearly Rs. 2,00,000 handed over to the Mission in 1952 by the collectors of *Amrita Bāzār Patrikā-Jugāntar* East Bengal Refugee Relief Fund. A third section was what is now known as the Janashikshāmandira. It was started in 1950, and conducted in 1953 sixteen adult education centres with an average attendance of 315. The Audio-visual unit

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conducted 87 functions. Under its auspices functioned youth camps and several milk canteens. It also organised sports for school and college students. Under the fourth section of the Sāradāpitha, called the Tattwamandira, started in 1952, functioned a Sanskrit School with an erudite scholar as its teacher.

Let us now take for our study another comprehensive educational institution, the Vidyālaya at Perianāickenpālayam in Coimbatore. It had its residential High School, with a roll strength of 171, providing various types of extra-curricular occupation and training over and above general education. The Basic Education Section comprised a Junior and a Senior Basic School, a Junior and a Senior Grade Training School and a Post-graduate Training College. Furthermore, the Teachers' Training College prepared the students for the B.T. Degree of the Madras University. The School of Engineering with a three years' course imparted teaching in moulding, machine-work, fitting, welding, etc. Its outdoor dispensary also did useful work by treating annually more than 17,000 cases. And in addition, the institution organised youth camps and provided short courses in Basic Education, First Aid, Rural Engineering, etc.

The Rāmakrishna Mission Āshrama in the village of Sarishā in West Bengal had a boys' High School with an attached hostel for about 100 boys, a girls' High School with a small hostel, two Basic Primary Schools, a residential Basic Training School for women, an Area Library and a number of Social Education centres, in addition to an outdoor dispensary.

Another progressive institution was the Rāmakrishna Mission Boys' Home at Raharā in West Bengal. Originally an orphanage, it upgraded its M. E. School in 1949 into a High School and started in 1953 a Junior Technical, a Junior Basic and a Basic School.

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For the inmates and for some of the village boys, it also conducted the Vocational School started in 1944.

The group of schools organised under the Rāmakrishna Mission Boys' Schools, Tyāgarāyanagar, had under it in 1953 three High Schools served by a hostel and three Elementary Schools as feeder institutions.

The Rāmakrishna Mission Vivekānanda Society of Jamshedpur, Bihār, had under its management quite a number of schools of different grades. There were four High Schools, two for boys and two for girls; two Middle Schools, and two Upper Primary and two Lower Primary Schools—that is, eleven Schools in all with a total strength of nearly 3,500. There were also two Students' Homes accommodating about 80 boys.

Of the Homes for college students, the Rāmakrishna Mission Calcutta Students' Home, uprooted from its premises by the War in 1941, took steps to re-establish itself by purchasing in 1950 a plot of land measuring about 34·6 acres near the Belghariā railway station 7 miles north of Calcutta. In 1953 the land was developed, and the construction on it of nine buildings and a modest temple according to a well-thought out plan was nearing completion.

The Mission's activities in Ceylon spread over the districts of Batticaloa, Badulla, Jaffna and Trincomalie. In 1953 it had in its care the education of about 8,000 boys and girls belonging to twenty-four institutions, of which four are English Schools. Besides, it maintained three hostels with 180 boarders and three orphanages with 130 inmates. Through these far-flung educational centres the Mission in Ceylon aimed at the revival of culture and learning among the masses, while the same function was performed for the educated classes by the main centre at Colombo, and for all sections of the people by its branch, the Madam or pilgrims' rest-house at Kataragama, 180 miles from Colombo, which

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was completed and opened in July, 1953, at a cost of about Rs. 3,50,000.

The Rāmakrishna Mission of Singapore, with its office at 9 Norris Road and Āshrama in the outskirts of the city at 179 Bartley Road, conducted two Tamil Schools of about 100 boys and 150 girls respectively, a smaller School with 25 children, a Night School with about 90 adult students, an Industrial School with nearly 50 trainees and a Boys' Home with 80 inmates. And along with this educational endeavour, the centre kept the light of spirituality burning with its scripture classes, annual celebrations and regular worship at the fine Rāmakrishna Temple, which with its marble statue was consecrated in October, 1952.

From the above brief, but fairly informative, study of some of the institutions, the reader will get an idea about the Mission's activities during the period. The Math centres too did not remain idle. It is true that religion was their real preoccupation, and they should be judged from that point of view. Yet they could not shun humanitarian service on a religious plane, though it is commonly misjudged to be a secular work. The philosophy of practical Vedānta that the monks preached, the helplessness all around and the historic necessity of the time would not leave them either shut up in their cloisters or talking and preaching merely to confirmed devotees and appreciative audiences. They too had to move with the times. This does not mean that they either ignored or neglected the traditional ways of the monks. Far from it. They took up worship, self-culture and religious discourses as the basic facts of life, without which a religious order was not worth its name, and a deficiency in which could only lead to a national disaster. The open preaching of materialistic doctrines made them all the more conscious of the need of spiritual values. Thus the Math libraries and

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reading rooms multiplied and grew larger ; the religious publications went up both in quality and variety ; the temples sprang up with better aesthetic appeal and greater facilities for prayer and meditation ; the lecture tours became better organised, more frequent and better appreciated, and the friends and devotees of the Āshramas attended the seasonal functions with greater enthusiasm and in increased numbers. Thus the birth-day anniversaries of Shri Rāmakrishna at the Belur Math now drew at least three hundred thousand people, in place of the twenty-five or thirty thousand that had gladdened Swāmi Vivekānanda's heart ; and this in spite of the fact that the Math could no longer feed the whole assemblage with consecrated food as in the days of old. All these activities were there ; and still the contribution of the Maths in the field of philanthropy was not inconsiderable.

The Māyāvati Charitable Hospital served 180 and 10,685 patients in its indoor and outdoor departments in 1953. The Rāmakrishna Āshrama of Nāgpur in the same year had a total attendance of 36,941 at its two dispensaries—one in the Āshrama itself and another in the backward area of Indorā. It also conducted a Students' Home with 25 inmates and a fine library with 8,000 books, in addition to its extensive publication work in Hindi and Marāthi. The attendance at the dispensaries at Madras was 84,363, at Rājkot 17,362, at Ponnampet (Coorg) 21,218 and at Chandipur (Midnapore) 29,260. At all these places the patients got free medicines. This was also the case at Trivandrum, where the outdoor dispensary attended 14,010 cases, the indoor department with 40 beds admitted 745 patients, the antenatal clinic and child welfare centre took care of 1,300 cases, the Āyurvedic dispensary treated 2,047 cases and a milk and gruel canteen served 100 adults and 30 children daily.

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In education, the Rāmakrishna Āshrama of Trichur developed several departments. In 1953 it had a home for 18 girls, a home for 26 boys, a High School with 877 students, an Industrial School with 12 students, and two Night Schools for adults. Besides, the Āshrama conducted two libraries—one at the school premises and the other at Punkunnam in the town itself. Further, its charitable dispensary served 7,154 cases.

The Rāmakrishna Āshrama of Bangalore conducted a Students' Home, whose inmates numbered 22 in 1953. It also had a Sunday School for boys, the attendance at the end of the year being 100.

The Rāmakrishna Āshrama of Mysore constructed a magnificent hostel in October, 1950, with a capacity for 200 students on an extensive and commanding site close to the Āshrama. This was converted into a residential High School in 1952. For many years the Āshrama conducted a small study circle for the monks and novices of the Rāmakrishna Order. The Āshrama had to its credit a number of publications in Canarese.

Equally progressive in educational activities is the Rāmakrishna Advaita Āshrama of Kalady (Travancore), which added a Primary School in 1950 and a Students' Home for school boys in 1953, in addition to an Āyurvedic dispensary in 1951. Thus it had in 1953 a Primary School with 190 boys, a Sanskrit Middle School with a strength of 242, a High English School with 251 boys on the rolls, an orphanage with 10 Harijan boys and a Students' Home with 30 inmates, besides an Āyurvedic dispensary, which treated 4,746 patients. It also took over the Malayālam organ of the Order, *Prabuddha Keralam*, from the Trivandrum Āshrama in 1950. Along with all this has been developed a Malayālam publication department.

One particular incident that gladdened the hearts of all was that on the 1st March, 1949, a stone temple,

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designed by Shri Nandalāl Bose, was begun by the Belur Math on the actual birth-place of the Master at Kāmārpukur, for which the necessary land had been acquired in 1947. After completion it was dedicated on May 11, 1951. The temple is built of Chunār stone in a simple style befitting the rural setting, with just a few features added to admit light and air and for convenience of worship and prayer. The temple enshrines a white marble image of the Master. In compliance with the requirements of law, though the temple is managed by the Rāmakrishna Math, the Mission is responsible for the upkeep of the cottages, which are preserved just as they were in the old days. In addition, the Mission started in 1947 an Upper Primary School and a charitable dispensary, to which other works have been added in course of time.

The centres in America and Europe flourished equally well. In 1940, several young men and women had joined the Hollywood centre with the hope of becoming monks and nuns. In 1947, the Trustees of the Belur Math permitted Swāmi Prabhavānanda to initiate three deserving aspirants, including a young woman, into Brahmacharya. This was really a preliminary step to reviving the old Indian method of spiritual development introduced experimentally in the West by Swāmi Vivekānanda in 1895 and since discontinued. Swāmi Prabhavānanda brought out a number of publications dealing with Hindu scriptures and Vedāntic thought. The books and the magazine, *Vedānta and the West,* started in January, 1938, were published from the Vedānta Press belonging to the centre. Much of the expansion of the Society was made possible by the generous gifts of Western students.[1] Thus in 1944, Spencer Kellogg donated 12½ acres of land with a fine building at Santa Barbara, 86 miles north of Los Angeles, together with an

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endowment for its maintenance, and another student donated the cost of purchasing 16 acres of adjacent land. These enabled the Society to dedicate the place in October, 1947 as a convent, named Shri Sāradā Math. Another development took place at Trabuco Canyon, about 60 miles south of Los Angeles, where Gerald Heard, the noted writer, had been organising from 1939 a college for religious students. This beautiful 300-acre establishment was handed over to the Vedānta Society and dedicated as the Rāmakrishna Monastery in September, 1949.

On the initiative of Swāmi Ashokānanda, the Vedānta Society at San Francisco purchased in September, 1946, 2,000 acres of hilly forest land at Olema in Marin County, across the Bay, an hour's drive from San Francisco. One of the beauty spots of California, it was intended for a magnificent retreat, for which work was taken in hand. The existing building of the Society, the Hindu Temple, being old and too small for the growing congregation, land was purchased close by, and another stately Temple with a spacious auditorium was under construction since 1953.

The Vedānta Society of New York suffered a temporary set-back in the passing away of Swāmi Bodhānanda on May 18, 1950, after a strenuous service of thirty-eight years. But the vacancy was ably filled up in March, 1951 by Swāmi Pavitrānanda, who was then serving as an Assistant Secretary of the Math and Mission at the headquarters. He succeeded in remodelling the old chapel of the Society, which was dedicated in March, 1952.

The Rāmakrishna-Vivekānanda Centre of New York also had its chapel remodelled in 1952 to add a balcony. Swāmi Nikhilānanda, the head of the centre, who had already made a deep impression on the intellectual circles in America by his translation

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of *The Gospel of Sri Rāmakrishna* (1942) and the *Gitā* (1944), published a translation of *The Upanishads*, Vols. I and II, in 1949 and 1952, and *Vivekānanda: A Biography* and *Vivekānanda; The Yogas and Other Works* in 1953.

Under the able ministership of Swāmi Devātmānanda, in the extensive, fir-clad, elevated land near Scappoose, about 20 miles from Portland, Oregon, an attractive temple was under construction. The Vivekānanda Vedānta Society of Chicago carried on its usual work under Swāmi Vishwānanda from a new abode at 506 Deming Place. The Rāmakrishna Vedānta Centre of Seattle, which, under the ministership of Swāmi Vividishānanda, had secured its permanent home in 1942 at 2716 North Broadway in a beautiful and secluded quarter of the city, outlived the little opposition it had met at the beginning and was looking forward with confidence to a bright future.

The Vedānta Society of St. Louis, located since August, 1952, in a stone house at 205 South Skinker Boulevard, is one of the six temples of different faiths that stand in a row facing the extensive Forest Park across the Street. The initial apathy toward new ideas having been removed by persistent helpful work, Swāmi Satprakāshānanda, the leader, can now write with assurance: "Slowly, but surely, the universal teachings of Vedānta are taking root in the interior of the United States." The truth is, Vedānta has come to stay in that great country as a whole. As Swāmi Nikhilānanda writes: "From our twenty years of experience I have become convinced that the spiritual ideals of India are being gradually appreciated by intelligent men and women in America. A better understanding between these two countries is thus being created. But as with all worth-while undertakings, the progress is slow."

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When Swāmi Ghanānanda of Mauritius arrived in England in October, 1948, on his way back to India from the U.S.A., where he had gone after a preaching tour of nine months in South Africa, it was only to stay for a few weeks till a passage could be booked. But being invited by some people interested in Vedānta, he began preaching in an informal way at 8 Belsize Avenue, London N.W.3 from the very next month. About that time the Belur Math authorities entirely disapproved the political bias imported by Swāmi Avyaktānanda into his teachings as the head of the existing Vedānta centre in London. As the Swami could not give up his fondness for what he called Vedāntic Communism, he dissociated himself and his activities from the Rāmakrishna Math and Mission by his letter dated June 16, 1949, in which he wrote among other things, "I realise fully how wise it is for the Rāmakrishna Math and Mission to keep aloof from the conflicting ideologies and political movements in order to serve mankind spiritually and materially." Swāmi Ghanānanda was, therefore, called upon by the authorities to continue his work, which was named the Rāmakrishna Vedānta Centre. The Swāmi soon attracted the attention of religious-minded people, through whose help he was able not only to start a bi-monthly magazine, *Vedānta for East and West,* in September, 1951, but also to secure a permanent home for the centre at 68 Dukes Avenue, Muswell Hill, London N. 10.

We saw Swāmi Siddheshwarānanda back in Paris after the conclusion of the War. Through the generosity of a lady devotee, the centre purchased in March, 1948, a fine property at Gretz, Seine-et-Marne, 22 miles from Paris, which was occupied after renovation in June. The place is designated as *Centre Vedāntique Rāmakrichna* and is situated on Boulevard Victor Hugo.

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From 1951 cultural activities were started at the Āshrama, similar to those of the Mission Institute of Culture in Calcutta. In October, 1953, the Centre was registered as an Association under French law, thus giving it legal status.

A few words regarding the work in Buenos Aires will finish this review of the foreign centres. From its own beautiful home at Bella Vista, F.C.P., where the Rāmakrishna Āshrama had moved in July 1941, Swāmi Vijayānanda continued to preach in Spanish and English and to publish the works of Swāmi Vivekānanda in Spanish.

It is now high time to return to India to record some of the important events that took place during the years we are dealing with here. The first was the sad demise of Swāmi Virajānanda on May 30, 1951. Though belonging to the second generation, he was the last monk reminiscent of the infancy of the Order, having joined the Barnagore monastery within five years of its founding. After his passing, the mantle of office fell on Swāmi Shankarānanda, one of the two Vice-Presidents and the senior Trustee, who had become associated with the Math shortly after the exit of Swāmi Vivekānanda. He was a disciple of Swāmi Brahmānanda, with whom he lived for many years during the last part of the Swāmi's life, mostly as his secretary. In his early life he had closely associated with two notable disciples of Swāmiji, Swāmi Sadānanda and Sister Niveditā. With the former he once visited Japan, and with the latter he saw many of the ancient seats of Indian culture, architecture and religion. During his Math life, he had the advantage of mixing intimately with most of the disciples of the Master. In and outside Belur, he worked in various capacities for a pretty long time. Swāmi Brahmānanda loved him much and had faith in his executive capacity. In

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later years he generally lived a retired life, though holding different offices of the Math and Mission whenever necessary, including Presidentship of the Bhubaneshwar and Delhi centres, and attending the meetings of the Trustees and the Governing Body. By a majority of votes he was called upon to shoulder the heavy responsibility of the President of the Math and Mission.

Swāmi Vishuddhānanda now remained the sole Vice-President, the first one to be officially vested with a spiritual responsibility, that of initiating lay devotees with the Lord's sacred name. After Swāmi Vivekānanda, so long as the Holy Mother and Swāmi Brahmānanda lived, the other disciples of the Master living in India refrained generally from imparting such initiation. After their passing away, Swāmi Shivānanda, the President, and Swāmi Sāradānanda, the Secretary, as also Swāmi Subodhānanda to some extent, performed the function. Then the President alone generally took up the responsibility, though the Vice-President too sometimes shared it with him. This self-denial was more or less a matter of good sense and decorum. Some even among the worthy had personal scruples about it. When the question of Swāmi Shuddhānanda's elevation to the Presidentship arose, he demurred and said that he could assume the constitutional leadership alone without its spiritual counterpart. But he was at last persuaded not to insist on a split of functions that automatically went together. It became an unwritten practice from this time that the President alone would initiate even the lay devotees, though in the absence of any formal rule, some senior monks outside the Board of Trustees felt no hesitation in making disciples. The majority of monks, however, were sensible enough to understand that such unrestricted behaviour would only lead to chaos and

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indiscipline that would hamper balanced growth. The upshot of all this was that on the recommendation of the Monks' Conference of April, 1946, the Trustees forthwith made it a rule that none except the President would give spiritual initiation, unless specifically authorised to do so by the Trustees. This had a salutary effect in checking indiscriminate open initiation by incompetent persons. But the ever growing demand from thousands of lay aspirants living in distant parts of the country for a spiritual link with the Rāmakrishna Order had to be met at least halfway. Accordingly, the Trustees later on decided that the Vice-President too would initiate lay seekers. And in recent years, Swāmi Yatishwarānanda, a disciple of Swāmi Brahmānanda, with whose brilliant record of services both in this country, and in the West the reader is already familiar, has also been authorised by the Trustees. Incidentally, it may be mentioned that the Swāmis going to the West as heads of centres have always enjoyed this privilege.

Two important decisions followed from the recommendations of the Monks' Conference of May, 1952. The first was the suspension of the Working Committee, which had been created under circumstances already described in 1926. The argument in favour of the step was that since consultation of general opinion in the matter of selecting new Trustees had been conceded on the advice of the Monks' Conference of 1937, there remained no need for a Working Committee to be constituted on the same basis, particularly because such duplication of deliberation sometimes inevitably led to great delay in decisions being taken, which hampered work. The other cogent argument was that, though the Working Committee was meant to be a partially representative body and a training ground for younger monks in administration, in practice the membership

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remained confined to those few able senior monks who lived near about Belur; for it was no easy matter to release trusted and experienced monks from their responsible posts in remote parts of the world. To make up for any possible inconvenience due to the absence of the Working Committee, the existing permanent Sub-Committees might be multiplied, if necessary.

The other result was very far-reaching in its consequences. It related to the establishment of a convent for women. The idea, which really was Swāmi Vivekānanda's, had been brewing for some years past. In fact, in the two preceding Conferences references had been made to it, though it was not pushed far enough. The Trustees of the Belur Math in their meeting of the 29th May, 1952, accepted the following recommendation of the Monks' Conference held from the 15th to the 18th of that month, which we quote *in extenso* for the sake of accuracy and clarity. It runs thus:

"As this Conference is of opinion that it is high time to go forward to realise Swāmiji's idea that women should be put in a position to work out their destinies independent of men, it recommends:

(*i*) that women aspirants in the highest spiritual life who have renounced their homes and joined our Math and Mission work with the approval of the Head-quarters and who are designated as dedicated women workers be helped through reasonable stages to form as early as possible an independent organisation of their own;

(*ii*) that as a first step in this process, a central body of such dedicated women workers be formed, and that the existing women's institutions and sections of our Math and Mission be placed one after another under its management;

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(*iii*) that at the end of ten years or earlier, if this central body of dedicated women workers is found competent by the Math and Mission authorities as the case may be, it should be legally registered and the relevant Math or Mission institutions for women be legally transferred to it;

(*iv*) that the interim arrangements should be inaugurated on the occasion of the Holy Mother's Birth Centenary by providing this central body of dedicated women workers with a suitable Home, so that when this body will be finally separated and registered, this Home may develop by the time of Swāmiji's Birth Centenary into an independent Math for women as laid down by Swāmiji in the Belur Math Rules.

"Since women aspirants have been initiated into formal Brahmacharya by Swāmiji, Swāmi Brahmānandaji and Swāmi Shivānandaji, this Conference recommends that this initiation be given, during the interim period but not afterwards, by the President of our Order to the dedicated women aspirants who are found fit by the President and Trustees for the time being.

"Having regard to the fact that Swāmiji, in his writings and utterances and specially in his Math Rules, has strongly advocated Sannyāsa for women, this Conference recommends that, at the time of the complete separation of this body of dedicated women workers as an independent organisation, if any of them already formally initiated into Brahmacharya should make a request for Sannyāsa and be found fit by the President and Trustees for the time being, the President will ordain them as Sannyāsinis, but thereafter there will be no such ordination of women by our President."

The first tangible result of this was that on the hundredth birthday of the Holy Mother, which accord-

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ing to the luni-solar calculation fell on December 27, 1953, a group of dedicated women workers of the Order took the vow of Brahmacharya at the Belur Math under the aegis of Swāmi Shankarānanda, President of the Order, to form the nucleus of the convent. This is the first time that women were admitted as nuns into the Order in India. As noted above, women had already been given this privilege in the U.S.A. six years ago.

The last week of December, 1953, marked the beginning of the Birth Centenary Celebration of the Holy Mother, whose advent had imparted a fresh meaning and a higher dignity to womanhood in general all over the world. All her life, she had kept herself aloof from the public, hiding her sterling worth in the privacy of her spirituality, which found expression in an unassuming self-abandonment in everyday duty. But her children now determined to make her speak in public. In accordance with this, an elaborate arrangement was made on the initiative of the head-quarters at Belur to propagate the ideas and ideals she stood for, through a series of celebrations, meetings, conferences, fairs, publications, etc., much as it had been done in the case of the Master. From the very nature of the case it could not of course be on that grand scale; for as a result of her bashfulness that disdained all fanfaronade, and her extreme simplicity that concealed an unparalleled sainthood, the general public had very little knowledge of her. For that reason even her children felt diffident at first about the success of the celebration; and to many of them it seemed a little indecent to talk so loudly of one who shunned publicity. Yet, when the plan was made known, the response outstripped all expectations.

The Centenary was inaugurated at the Belur Math on December 27 by Swāmi Shankarānanda, President

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of the Order, whose message was broadcast from the Calcutta station of the All-India Radio. The celebrations at Belur lasted for a week. In connection with the celebrations, an attractive volume entitled the *Great Women of India*, written by eminent scholars and hailed everywhere as a work of outstanding merit, was brought out on the birthday of the Mother as an offering to her sacred memory, as also a comprehensive life of her in Bengali by the present writer and some smaller lives. All of these were sponsored by the Centenary Committee. We shall conclude the topic of the Centenary in the next chapter.

An important administrative change during these years was the assumption of the General Secretaryship by Swāmi Vireshwarānanda from April, 1949 to March, 1951, for which period Swāmi Mādhavānanda retired temporarily from work for recouping his health. The latter resumed his office from April 1, 1951.

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CURRENT EVENTS

(1954—April, 1957)

The Holy Mother Birth Centenary celebration, inaugurated on December 27, 1953, continued throughout 1954. The people of Bengal and South India took it up as a national festival, while in other parts of the world, wherever there were Rāmakrishna centres, the Holy Mother received, on the inaugural day and a whole year thereafter, the heartfelt adoration of her children in all possible ways.

The inaugural celebrations at the Belur Math ended on January 3, 1954, with a pilgrim procession from there to Dakshineshwar, in which thousands of devotees and monks joined with flags, festoons and banners around the pictures of Shri Rāmakrishna and the Holy Mother, placed in elegantly decorated palanquins. Another important function that succeeded the inauguration was a Convention of the women devotees of Shri Rāmakrishna and the Holy Mother in Calcutta from April 2 to 6, 1954, in which fifty delegates from various quarters of India and abroad took part. The idea was mooted and executed entirely by the women followers of the Holy Mother. The Convention had four sessions at the Calcutta University Institute Hall, during which thirty speakers dwelt on the life and teachings of the Holy Mother. The rest of the functions, held at the Mahābodhi Society's Hall, were open to women only. Besides discussing the different phases of the Holy Mother's life, the symposia held there concentrated on the status of women in social and educational spheres.

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The devotees and monks then hurried to Jayrāmbāti, the birth-place of the Mother, where in her temple, now made more spacious and beautiful, a white marble image of hers was installed on April 8, 1954 with great *éclat* and due solemnity. With the willing co-operation of the villagers, elaborate arrangements were made at Jayrāmbāti during this function to accommodate and feed nearly three thousand pilgrims. For a couple of days the empty paddy fields near the temple looked like a township, with motor vehicles plying on improvised roads, electric lights brightening up the whole place and tap water available at every corner. And on that levelled ground the pilgrims lived happily in huts of straw, satisfied with the simple fare that could be provided by the management.

We cannot afford to give the readers even a glimpse of the vast scale on which the Centenary was celebrated everywhere. We must perforce skip over almost a whole year to return to the functions held in Calcutta under the auspices of the central organisation. One of the outstanding items there was an Exhibition of Arts, Crafts and Culture held at 163 Lower Circular Road, the premises being lent by a devotee. Opened on December 5, 1954, and concluded on January 2, next year, it brought into bold relief the glorious achievements of Indian women in these fields. Another important item was the All-India Women's Music Conference at the Calcutta University Institute Hall from December 17 to 19, 1954. In a sense it was unique, since the organisers and artistes were all women. A programme of classical and modern music and dancing excited the admiration of all. A Sub-committee of this Conference organised a music competition for amateur girl students of Indian music. The next important function was the Women's Cultural Conference held at the same Hall from December 20 to

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25, in which nearly 200 delegates from all over India participated, and which was addressed by many distinguished speakers, among whom may be mentioned Āchārya Jadunāth Sarkār, Prof. Kshiti Mohan Sen and Swāmi Nikhilānanda. The concluding ceremony at the Belur Math started on December 16 and ended on December 26 with a grand procession from the Cossipore garden-house, where the Rāmakrishna Movement sprouted, to the Belur Math, where it found its full growth. Nearly ten thousand pilgrims participated in this mile-and-a-half long procession, which wended its way on foot over what is now the Vivekānanda Bridge, connecting the two banks of the Hooghly at Dakshineshwar. Starting at 8 a.m., the devotees reached the Belur Math at noon and partook of the consecrated food there. This was really the last day of the celebration; but some functions continued in other places for a few days more.

Before we leave this topic, we should mention here that in addition to the books referred to in the last chapter, and the special numbers of the monthly organs of the Rāmakrishna Order, quite a number of books on the life and teachings of the Holy Mother came out during the period or shortly after in different parts of India and in various languages. A Hindi edition of the large biography of the Holy Mother was published under the auspices of the Centenary Committee from Calcutta in 1955. In the same year, an English edition of the book was also brought out by the Madras Math.

All this time the Mission activities expanded mostly with Governmental patronage, as we hinted earlier. This help was specially in evidence in the field of education. During this period the State Governments in India launched various educational schemes at the instance of the Central Government. The reform took

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the shape of Basic Schools, both in the senior and junior grades, and Multi-purpose Schools in the higher secondary stage. Explaining in brief the new objective aimed at, Dr. B. C. Roy, Chief Minister of West Bengal, spoke thus at the opening ceremony of the Mission's Multi-purpose School at Raharā on June 24, 1956: "The intellectual level of the people has to be raised; and to raise that level, again, the system of schooling must be based on the requisite foundation. The main point is to mould the student in such a way that he may undertake various responsibilities in life. . . . The State Government, as also the Central Government, is now convinced that the system must undergo an overhaul. It is with this object that the Multi-purpose School system is being evolved, requiring a total period of eleven years' schooling. In the primary stage, after five years, if a boy does not or cannot go up for the higher stage, his training should not run to waste. It must be such as will be of help to his parents, say, in agricultural work. Similarly, after training in the next stage, a boy should be competent to be a tradesman or technician. After the next stage, he might go in for medical, engineering and similar vocations. The rest should still have the course open for higher university education. At every stage the training should be self-sufficient, and there should be no wastage. The multi-purpose ideal seeks to bring about these changes."

On the whole, the new system introduces a practical bias by combining crafts, technical subjects and science with general education, laying emphasis on one or more of these factors in accordance with the needs of the area, facilities available and the aptitude of the students. At the conclusion of each higher stage, the student can decide whether to pursue general education or enter some technical, vocational or professional

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school or college. In brief, the stages are as follows: (1) Pre-Basic (Nursery) Schools for children between the ages of three to five years. (2) Junior Basic Schools comprising classes I to V for the age-group ranging from six to ten years. (3) Senior Basic Schools with classes from VI to VIII meant for students between the ages of eleven to thirteen years. (4) Multi-purpose Schools or Higher Secondary Schools teaching up to Class XI and equipping the alumni for a three years' degree course in the general line or for technical and professional colleges, as they prefer.

In West Bengal, schools of the new type were either ushered in or definite steps were taken in this direction at the following Mission centres: Raharā, Āsānsol, Calcutta (Bāghbāzār), Sarishā, Midnapore, Manasādwip, Sārgāchhi, Māldā, Kāmārpukur and Puruliā.

The Boys' Home at Raharā adapted itself fully to this new outlook. At the end of 1956 it had the following schools within its campus: Junior Basic School, Junior Technical School, Senior Basic-*cum*-Junior Technical School, Vocational School and Multi-purpose High School. The outstanding events during the period were the completion of the Multi-purpose School building and the extension of the dormitories to which was added a Post-office building. The necessary structures for the Multi-purpose Schools at Āsānsol and Sarishā progressed satisfactorily. The Sister Niveditā Girls' School in Calcutta and the Boys' High School at Sarishā reshaped themselves with diversification of courses into general, technical and scientific starting from Class IX. The Girls' High School at Sarishā too, reorganised similarly in 1955, got permission for conversion into the new type, and steps are being taken to build the necessary structure. Besides these two schools, the Mission centre at Sarishā conducted

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during the period two Junior Basic Schools, a residential Basic Training College for women teachers and a technical section, started in 1954 as an appendage to the Girls' School. The High School at Midnapore was upgraded to a Multi-purpose School; the foundation of a building for it was laid in March, 1957. The Āshrama at Manasādwip, at the mouth of the Hooghly, was separated in 1955 from the Contai centre and constituted into a full-fledged Mission centre devoted to education with two primary schools for boys and girls respectively (the former since converted into a Junior Basic School), a High School, a small Students' Home and a Library and reading room. The primary school at the Sārgāchhi Āshrama was transformed into a Junior Basic School in 1956; the lower secondary school there was raised to the higher secondary standard in January, 1957, with a view to developing it into a Multi-purpose School, with provision for teaching science and agriculture, for which sanction has been obtained. The Āshrama also got permission for starting a Junior Basic Teachers' Training College. In pursuance of the general trend for modernisation, the Mission centre at Māldā conducted a Pre-Basic (Nursery) School, a Junior Basic School and a vocational section for women. Besides, this centre put up a two-storeyed building for its High School. The Kāmārpukur centre conducted a Junior Basic School. The latest development in this field has been the decision to transfer the higher classes of the Vidyāpith of Deoghar (Bihār) to Puruliā, where, with Government help, they will be constituted into a residential Multi-purpose School. The plan is being pursued actively.

Thus the co-operation between the Mission and the West Bengal Government ensured a steady progress here in recent years, as it has been doing all along in

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the South. There was success in other places also. At the request of the authorities of the Hindusthān Ship-yard, Vishākhapatnam (old Vizagapatam), the local Mission Āshrama started a Middle School there in June, 1955. The Higher Secondary School at Kānpur provided itself with better educational facilities and made extensions to its existing school building, so that the institution is now a glory to the city. The Boys' Schools at Tyāgarāyanagar, Madras, constructed a building for one of its Elementary Schools. In 1954 the Girls' High School, under the Sāradā Vidyālaya of Madras, had its new three-storey building with 45 class rooms. With help from the Government of India, another imposing structure reared itself for housing the centre's Basic Training School, into which its existing Training School was converted from the middle of 1956. A bungalow was purchased in 1955 to serve as a hostel for the School.

We now turn to the Library movement, to which Governmental help on an all-India basis gave a fillip and the Rāmakrishna organisation contributed its mite. The Math centre at Rājkot had a building for its public library at a cost of more than Rs. 1,00,000, which was opened in October, 1955, by Dr. Rādhākrishnan, Vice-President of India. The Patnā Mission centre had its new, commodious library and reading room opened by him in March, 1956. The centre has put up another storey over the structure to serve as a lecture hall. The Mission centre at Raharā, which had been conducting a District Library for North 24-Parganās with Government help, constructed with similar aid an attractive building for this purpose, which was opened in January, 1957. The Math centre at Nāgpur started construction of a library building with grants from the State and Central Governments, the estimated cost being Rs. 1,65,000. The Mission

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Āshrama at Morābādi, Rānchi, put up a library building with reading rooms and facilities for lectures etc. The most outstanding development in this direction was at New Delhi, where the Mission built a big library and auditorium at a cost of Rs. 3,33,200, which were opened by Shri Jawāharlāl Nehru, Prime Minister of India, in November, 1956. The library has stacking space for 25,000 volumes, and can accommodate 100 readers at a time. The auditorium has a seating capacity of 850.

In addition to the construction of large public libraries, the Library movement took various other forms in different places for engendering a love of literature among the public. There were circulating libraries at Tamluk, Sarishā, and Raharā attached to the central libraries at those places. Sarishā and Raharā had under them 7 and 34 branch libraries respectively. The Vishākhapatnam centre opened a children's library in October, 1956. In addition, Raharā and the Sāradāpitha, Belur, had each a mobile library serving the neighbourhood.

Another development during the period was the entry of the Math and Mission in an organised way into the field of social elevation and adult social education, for which they received Government help. They were not altogether new in this line; but the lead given by the Government made them more dynamic. We may mention in this connection the Rāmakrishna Mission Women's Welfare Centre in Entally, Calcutta (P. 22 C.I.T. Road), which is conducted by the dedicated women workers of the Sāradā Math in a house donated by a friend.

In the domain of rural development in general, the Sāradāpitha of Belur heads the list with its diverse activities and high level of work. Under it was set on foot a training centre for Social Education

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organisers hailing from different parts of India. A separate piece of land with a spacious building was purchased for the purpose, and a three-storeyed building to accommodate 80 trainees was completed. Regular classes began in January, 1956. The construction of an administrative block is progressing satisfactorily. Its Janashikshāmandira, or centre for Social (Adult) Education, shifted to its permanent house in 1955, situated on about $3\frac{1}{2}$ acres of land acquired at a cost of Rs. 1,25,000, and a scheme of expansion and consolidation was taken in hand. It continued its service through night schools, film shows, magic lantern lectures, youth camps and a mobile audio-visual unit. The department further organised a number of centres for free distribution of milk, food packages, tiffin, etc. The Sarishā Āshrama conducted nine complete Social Education centres, in addition to a community centre for women with cultural meetings, literary classes and a small library managed by the women themselves. The Māldā and Manasādwip centres had each a building for a school-*cum*-community centre providing facilities for a library and social education. The Rajahmundry centre managed 10 Adult Education activities in 6 surrounding villages. The Kāmārpukur centre and the Belghariā Students' Home had each under it one such unit.

A big future in this field, as also in the domain of education in general, awaits the Mission Āshrama of Pāthuriāghātā, Calcutta. With the help of the Governments of India and West Bengal, the Āshrama purchased a garden-house, at a total cost of Rs. 4,73,000, at a village now called Narendrapur, eleven miles south of the city. It will accommodate the centre's Institute of Social Education and Recreation, as also its social education activities, in which the boys of the Āshrama will take a prominent part.

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With the Pāthuriāghātā Āshrama we enter the domain of Students' Homes, where also some striking developments took place. This Āshrama acquired some 30 acres of land, near the plot at Narendrapur just mentioned, to which it intends to remove its Students' Home after the necessary structures are erected. At present 70 of its students live there in temporary houses. The foundation of a permanent building was laid in January, 1957, to accommodate 200 poor and meritorious college students.

After passing through many vicissitudes, the Calcutta Students' Home succeeded at last on April 14, 1954, in getting itself rehabilitated in its new permanent premises at Belghariā, seven miles north of Calcutta. Its fairly large campus of about 34·6 acres had been purchased and developed to accommodate the existing number of students and to provide facilities for extra-curricular activities. A scheme for a technical institution there is on the anvil and will take shape soon.

In association with the Math centre already functioning at Rajahmundry, a Mission branch was opened there in September, 1954, which took up the Students' Home started two months earlier. At the end of 1955 it had 21 inmates. In 1956 the Bangalore Āshrama succeeded in completing on its own land the ground floor of a spacious building for its Students' Home. The Kalady Math centre started a second Students' Home in November, 1955, with 35 inmates. The Mission Institute of Culture in Calcutta is about to break new ground in the sphere of education with a day hostel for college students, which is now under construction on the extensive new site of the Institute, about a mile to the east of its present premises. Nearly 200 non-resident students will get all facilities

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for study under expert guidance, and they will be provided with food at a cheap rate.

So far as general education is concerned, the other events were the construction of an open-air theatre for the Vivekānanda College at Madras, a gymnasium with a commodious hall and eight side rooms for the Vidyāmandira (college) of the Sāradāpitha at Belur and an additional storey for the Students' Home at Bombay. It has been decided to raise the Vidyāmandira to a degree college, and also to start an institution for higher Sanskrit studies in the Sāradāpitha. The Delhi centre reorganised its weekly Sanskrit classes for the public into bi-weekly ones, which had an enrolment of about 100 citizens. The Perianāicken-pālayam (Coimbatore) Mission centre opened in 1955 an Extension and a Research Department in its Teachers' College.

In technical education, the Sāradāpitha of Belur topped the list. A three-storeyed administrative block and a well-equipped workshop of the Shilpamandira were built in 1956 at a cost of about Rs. 6,00,000. Furthermore, about 6½ acres of land across the Grand Trunk Road was acquired to raise a hostel for the alumni of this technical section at a cost of about Rs. 7,00,000, the foundation of the hostel being laid in January, 1957. Close behind this comes the Mission Students' Home of Madras, whose Technical Institute, specialising in automobile engineering, got Governmental sanction for additional equipment and building and a new section for the Mechanical Engineering Diploma course, the estimated cost being nearly Rs. 8,30,000.

We pass on to another topic after taking note of two more activities, humble though they be. The industrial section at Kalady, closed in 1953, was revived in 1956 to impart craft instruction to the school

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students. And at Māldā, the local women were taught tailoring and spinning of silk waste through the Sāradā Shilpa-Niketan.

Let us now have a last look at medical service, to be posted with the latest outstanding events during the period.

The Home of Service at Benares added in 1955 a wing to its out-patients' department, an X-ray building and a workers' block. The year 1956 witnessed the completion, at a cost of Rs. 55,000, of a self-contained surgical ward with 18 beds for women patients within the women's section. The Home also purchased a plot of land for Rs. 30,000. The Sevāshrama at Kankhal finished construction of its doctors' quarters and an X-ray block in 1956. These two centres, as also the Sevāshramas at Lucknow and Vrindāban, the Māyāvati Charitable Hospital and the Sevāshrama at Shyāmalā Tāl—all in Uttar Pradesh—were greatly benefited by substantial equipment and other grants from the Central and State Governments. The Lucknow Sevāshrama thus succeeded in equipping its Outdoor dispensary with X-ray, Diathermy, Infra-red and Ultra-violet units as well as with requisites for the dental department.

There were two very noteworthy growths in the Shishumangal Pratishthān of Calcutta. The first was the construction of an imposing nurses' hostel and some staff quarters, which cost nearly Rs. 7,50,000 and were opened in June, 1955. Secondly, as it was necessary to start a section for male patients, so that the nurses could have a practical training in attending to general diseases in addition to specialising in midwifery, a general ward with 25 beds was opened in April, 1956. In keeping with its general character, the hospital too has since been renamed Sevā Pratishthān. The name of Lansdowne Road, on which it

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stands, has also been changed by the Corporation into Sarat Bose Road.

The T.B. Sanatorium at Dungri, Rānchi, gradually increased its accommodation till the number of beds stood at 101 at the end of 1955. Another block of 56 beds was under construction and was occupied before the end of the year. In 1956, Shri Lawly Sen of Patnā made a gift of his large property there to the Mission. Out of the income of this, the Sanatorium gets about Rs. 1,000 a month, which has enabled it to increase the number of free beds. The T.B. Clinic of Delhi finished in 1954 its staff quarters and kitchen building at an expenditure of Rs. 78,000.

The Mission Āshrama at Kānpur added a special eye section to its dispensary. The Mission Sevāshrama of Calicut and the Mission Āshrama of Morābādi, Rānchi, put up separate buildings for their dispensaries in 1955 and 1956. The Math at Madras has been conducting a charitable dispensary, where the attendance in 1955 reached 1,10,403. It succeeded in constructing an extension of the dispensary at a cost of about Rs. 1,00,000, which was opened in December, 1956. New departments for ear-nose-throat, eye and surgery have been added to the dispensary. The Mission branch at Mangalore opened an allopathic charitable dispensary in 1955. The Karimganj centre started a homoeopathic dispensary in 1955. The Bombay centre extended its dispensary building in 1956.

We now turn our attention to the Relief operations. To quote from the General Report of the Rāmakrishna Mission for 1954-55: "In 1954, the Mission conducted Flood Relief work in the Lakhimpur District of Assam, Jalpāiguri and Cooch Behar Districts of West Bengal, Purnea and Darbhangā Districts of Bihār, and Dacca and Faridpur Districts of East Pakistan, as also the Rehabilitation work in the East Godāvari District

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of Andhra. In 1955, Flood Relief was conducted in the Māldā District of West Bengal, Goālpārā and Dhubri Districts of Assam, Darbhangā District of Bihār, Cuttack District of Orissa, Jaunpur and Āzamgarh Districts of Uttar Pradesh, and Tanjore and Rāmnād Districts of Madras, as also in the District of Dacca in East Pakistan."

The list is fairly long and proves once again how the Mission has been addressing itself unremittingly to the alleviation of human suffering over wide areas. To this we have also to add the operations undertaken in 1956, and we have to remember that most of this work was done by local branches or groups of them, thus taking the burden off the shoulders of the headquarters. The above Report specifically mentions the following: The Benares Home of Service conducted Flood Relief in U.P. in 1955 with workers borrowed from other centres. In 1954 and 1955, the Jalpāiguri centre did similar work in West Bengal, the Shillong centre in Assam and the Patnā centre in Bihār. So did the Māldā centre in that district in 1955. The Faridpur, Nārāyanganj and Dacca centres in East Pakistan co-operated in alleviating the suffering of the people of that region ravaged by floods and cyclone in 1954 and 1955. The Madras Mission undertook extensive flood and cyclone relief work in that State in 1955, which was continued up to the early months of 1957. Flood and rehabilitation work started by the Rajahmundry centre in 1953 was closed in 1955, the total expenditure being nearly Rs. 6,83,400. And the Bombay centre helped many of these operations by collecting money from the generous people of the city.

As some of these activities were of considerable magnitude, we shall accord a separate but brief treatment to them.

The Benares Home of Service initiated Flood

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Relief work in the districts of Jaunpur and Āzamgarh in August, 1955. It distributed about 44 tons of wheat, 34,935 lbs. of milk, 24,361 lbs. of butter oil (ghee) and 4,268 pieces of cloth, in addition to other daily requisites and some cash. The work was finished in October, 1955.

On November 30, 1955, a cyclone, followed by a tidal wave played havoc in some portions of the Tanjore and Rāmnād Districts of Madras. The Rāmakrishna Mission of Madras started relief operations in those areas from December 10. The Tamil newspaper *Dinamani* turned over to the Mission all its collections for the purpose. With this money and other contributions, the Mission is still carrying on the work. In addition to the distribution of food-stuffs, cloth and other household requirements, the Mission has been erecting houses. In June, 1956, a colony of 47 houses was opened at Chatrakudi in Rāmnād, and in September, another colony of 20 houses at Paramakudi in the same district. A colony of 200 houses, completed in 1956 and equipped with many modern facilities, at Vedāranyam in Tanjore, was opened in February, 1957.

At the invitation of the Government of Orissa, the Mission undertook relief work in several districts devastated by a flood in September, 1955. It distributed among other things about 64 tons of rice and wheat and 15,525 lbs. of powdered milk. Besides many pieces of cloth and garments were distributed.

A similar task was performed by the Mission in the Darbhangā District through its Patnā centre in 1955, weekly doles being given to some 5,000 flood-stricken people for over seven weeks.

Before we close our account of the Indian work, we have to record a few more salient events.

The Institute of Culture, Calcutta, has in hand a big constructional programme costing nearly Rs. 50,00,000,

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the fulfilment of which will place it on the map of international fellowship. The site chosen is beautifully situated in South Calcutta and has already been referred to in connection with the proposed day hostel for college students.

In pursuance of a cherished dream of Swāmi Vivekānanda to have a centre in Kāshmir, the Mission inaugurated an Āshrama at Srinagar in May, 1954, with an allopathic dispensary, a library and reading room, weekly classes, etc. on an experimental basis. But owing to economic and other reasons it had to be closed after two years. The time was not still opportune for it.

As the old house at Cossipore where Shri Rāmakrishna entered into final beatitude, became too rickety and unsafe to serve as a public place of pilgrimage, it had to be pulled down on technical advice. The new structure erected on the same foundation and as an exact replica of the original building, even with some of the old materials, was dedicated on January 1, 1955, the day being reminiscent of the abounding grace that Shri Rāmakrishna had showered on one and all present on the grounds of the garden-house on that particular day of 1886.

The Rāmakrishna Advaita Āshrama of Benares undertook in 1956 extensive additions to the existing structures for increasing its accommodation. The Jalpāiguri Āshrama started the erection of a Shri Rāmakrishna temple, for which the foundation had been laid in April, 1953. The Delhi centre progressed with the construction of a magnificent temple to Shri Rāmakrishna at an estimated cost of Rs. 3,00,000. The dedication is likely to take place in November, 1957. The Rānchi Āshrama purchased some land, and it as well as the Bombay Āshrama improved and extended its existing buildings.

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The Nāgpur centre started from March, 1957, a monthly journal in Marāthi called the *Jivan Vikās*, which is a very welcome step and removes a long-felt want.

To make good the loss of the Lahore centre consequent on the creation of Pakistan, the Mission purchased in September, 1954, a suitable plot at Chandigarh, new capital of the Punjab (I), and steps are being taken to erect suitable buildings.

We referred to the initiation into Brahmacharya of some dedicated women in connection with the Holy Mother Centenary celebrations. A convent for them came into being on July 10, 1954, in a house gifted to the Mission on C.I.T. Road, Entally, Calcutta. Some dedicated women workers of the Mission became the first inmates of this convent. Already a plot of land measuring over 6 acres on the Ganges at Dakshineshwar (P.O. Āriādaha), not far north of the Kāli Temple, with two buildings had been secured at a cost of about Rs. 4,35,000, and after extensive alterations in the main structure, the nuns moved to this permanent home on the 2nd December, 1954. During this early period, they have concentrated on a meditative life so as to prepare themselves for a life of service. This convent, which is called Shri Sāradā Math, is like the monasteries of the Order, under the control of the Trustees (General Report of the Mission for 1954-55).

The last, but not the least, important event that we have to relate is the founding of a Training Centre for the probationers of the Rāmakrishna Order at the Belur Math on May 13, 1956. The Convention of 1926 advocated such a step. But various questions tied up with the starting of a Training Centre, such as accommodation, releasing probationers from their onerous duties and meeting their expenses during training, proved baffling to the authorities. They tried

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various alternative methods, such as allowing only those centres to admit new boys that would provide some training, emphasising personal study, sending monks to the Study Circle at Mysore, or getting probationers trained at the Vedānta College started by Swāmi Shrivāsānanda at Bangalore. A tentative scheme was drawn up in 1947 to start the centre as early as possible at the Cossipore garden-house. But there also the difficulties of accommodation and maintenance proved insurmountable. At last, urged by the Monks' Conference of 1955, the Trustees decided to carry out the old scheme at the Belur Math instead of at Cossipore. The start was given with only ten probationers as students and two monks as whole-time teachers, the course being for two years. The institution is still at its formative stage, and much spade-work has to be done before it produces tangible results. But financial help has already been received in some measure, and it is hoped the difficulties will be gradually removed.

Among the Asian countries outside India, all that can be said of the Rāmakrishna Math and Mission centres in East Pakistan is that they maintained their existence and most of their usual activities.

The Mission Sevāshrama at Rangoon had a brilliant record of progress. Thus it succeeded in re-establishing itself and regaining the position of love and usefulness that it had occupied in the life of the city in pre-War days. In this laudable effort, the institution was greatly helped by the Governments of Burma and India as also the public of Rangoon. As a result the Sevāshrama was able to organise quite a number of departments, viz., an indoor hospital with 148 beds, of which 48 were for women; an outdoor dispensary with sections for general, dental, eye, ear-nose-throat and venereal diseases; physio-therapy and radium treatment; a clinical laboratory; X-ray and deep X-ray therapy,

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and compounder's training. With a donation of K (Rs.) 1,50,000 from the Government of Burma, Rs. 3,00,000 from the Government of India and other contributions from the public, the Sevāshrama completed a new building to accommodate the out-patient department and the administrative unit and had it opened on January 4, 1956, by the Prime Minister of Burma. Moreover, various other improvements were made at a cost of Rs. 2,85,000. In December, 1956, work was commenced on a building for its surgical department, with provision for an operation theatre, a surgical ward and all modern accessories.

The Mission Society of Rangoon improved its library substantially and published a few books in Burmese and English.

As for the activities in other foreign countries, the reader has so far got a fairly detailed picture, which has remained basically unaltered, except for a few more brilliant touches here and there that have added grace to the whole and opened up possibilities for future advance. He must also have noted that the Mission is in the foreground in India and the Asian countries, whereas the Math is so in Europe and America. For legal reasons the Math did not spread out in the East outside India and Pakistan, the centres in the latter country having sprung up before the partition of India. For legal reasons, again, and for facility of work, the Mission went only to those British possessions that had sufficient concentrations of Indian population to ensure its stability, and profit by its presence. In most of these places the Mission was separately registered, although a strong legal link with the headquarters was specifically guaranteed. The case was entirely different with regard to the Western countries, where the national constitution would not usually allow either the Math or the Mission to function

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as a legal entity. Still the work of the Math is made possible there by the goodwill of the countries served, the allegiance of the monks who represent the Math and the faith of the devotees attached to each unit. Moreover, the constitution of each centre provides for some spiritual and semi-legal link with the parent institution at Belur, though property is acquired and administered quite separately. Even in the face of such handicaps, the work in the West has progressed favourably, and the concluding years of our history bear witness to this. Let us take up the salient events one by one.

Swāmi Nikhilānanda, Head of the Rāmakrishna-Vivekānanda Centre of New York, published in 1956 the third volume of his Upanishad series. The manuscript for the fourth is also ready. From October, 1954, he had Swāmi Ritajānanda, deputed from India, as his assistant. At the same time Swāmi Sarvagatānanda went from India to Providence to take up the work of that centre as its Associate Minister, Swāmi Akhilānanda, who continued to be the Head, being mainly busy with the work of Boston.

Swāmi Prabhavānanda of the Hollywood Centre was assisted up to January, 1955, by Swāmi Asheshānanda. From July, 1955, he had as his assistant Swāmi Vandanānanda, ex-Editor of *Prabuddha Bhārata*. Attached to this centre and its two branches at Trabuco Canyon and Santa Barbara, there are twenty-three Brahmachārins and Brahmachārinis, all belonging to the U.S.A., who spend a good deal of their time in Japa and meditation in addition to attending to the daily duties at the centres. A beautiful Vedānta Temple was constructed at Santa Barbara and consecrated on February 13, 1956, in the presence of Swāmi Mādhavānanda, General Secretary, and Swāmi Nirvānānanda, Treasurer, Rāmakrishna Math, who had flown there

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from India for the occasion. Still another event has been the dedication a few days later of a house in memory of Swāmi Vivekānanda at 309 Monterey Road, South Pasadena, where the Swāmi stayed as a guest of the three Mead sisters for six weeks during his visit to South California in 1900. It was one of the sisters, Mrs. Carrie Mead Wyckoff, known later as Sister Lalitā, who donated her house at 1946 Ivar Avenue, Hollywood, to usher in the Vedānta Society there in 1930.

The Vivekānanda Vedānta Society of Chicago came to possess its own commodious house at 44 East Elm Street, Chicago 11, which was dedicated on May 6, 1955.

The Vedānta Society of Northern California, San Francisco, succeeded in partially bringing into existence a branch centre at Sacramento, the State capital. The development of the retreat at Olema, in Marin County, was proceeding, as well as the construction of the new Temple at San Francisco. Another interesting development has been the training that a number of young men aspiring to a dedicated life are undergoing at the San Francisco centre. Swāmi Shraddhānanda, ex-Editor, *Udbodhan,* has recently joined this centre as a second assistant.

In the charming retreat near Scappoose, about twenty miles from the city, the Vedānta Society of Portland built a temple in 1954 and installed a bronze head of Shri Rāmakrishna by Miss Malvina Hoffman, a noted sculptress of the U.S.A., in April, though the dedication of the temple had to wait for its completion in August. In February, 1955, Swāmi Asheshānanda took charge of the Portland centre in place of Swāmi Devātmānanda, who had to return to India on medical advice.

The Rāmakrishna Vedānta Centre of London published in December, 1955, a book entitled, *Women*

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Saints of East and West, in commemoration of the Holy Mother Centenary.

Swāmi Siddheshwarānanda of the Paris (Gretz) centre had a serious heart attack in 1954, and he was assisted in his work between August, 1954 and April, 1955 by Swāmi Nihshreyasānanda. After the latter's return to India, Swāmi Nityabodhānanda, ex-Editor of the *Vedānta Kesari,* and head of the Rajahmundry centre, went in February, 1956, to help in the Paris work. An important development was the erection in 1955 and 1956 of two double-storeyed residences for the dedicated women and men workers respectively. But the centre suffered an irreparable loss by the sudden death of its founder, Swāmi Siddheshwarānanda, on April 2, 1957. Swāmi Nityabodhānanda has stepped into his place.

On invitation from Africa, Swāmi Nihshreyasānanda, on his way to Paris, visited the continent in 1954. For about five months from the middle of March, he lectured in thirty towns covering Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika in the east, Nyasaland and the two Rhodesias in the centre and Nigeria and Gold Coast (Ghana) in the west. Everywhere, according to the facilities available, he spoke to the three sections of the population—African, Indian and European—either separately or together. In April, 1955, on his way back to India, the Swāmi stayed for a few days at Alexandria, where, in addition to discourses on Vedānta, he gave talks on spiritual exercises to a group of earnest seekers.

Readers will excuse us if we conclude this history on a note of high optimism: the Movement is well on the way to become a world force. The message of Rāmakrishna-Vivekānanda touches the deepest springs of human activity and is calculated to bring about an all-round regeneration. The Rāmakrishna Movement, starting from the Dakshineshwar and Cossipore days,

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has evolved through various contacts in the arena of the world, giving shape to that message at every turn and spreading it further and further. Spirituality has been its basic preoccupation, but spirituality has found simultaneous expression in social service in compliance with the needs of the time and the persons concerned. The primacy of spirituality was clearly enunciated by Swāmi Vivekānanda: "Spiritual knowledge is the only thing that can destroy our miseries for ever; so . . . he who gives man spiritual knowledge is the greatest benefactor of mankind, and as such we always find that those were the most powerful of men who helped man in his spiritual needs, because spirituality is the true basis of all our activities in life" (*Complete Works*, I, p. 50).

In its practical application, the new message has been hailed as the harmoniser of different points of view, the synthesiser of diverse cultures, the enhancer of human dignity and the creator of a new basis of human relationship. It is bound to take many more practical shapes as history unfolds itself. Even now, a considerable section of the world of thinkers is drawing inspiration from this source knowingly or unknowingly, and is reassessing the values of life from this fresh angle of vision. There are innumerable writers who mention Shri Rāmakrishna and Swāmi Vivekānanda by name, and many more who silently imbibe their ideas without even knowing the source. The Rāmakrishna Movement is progressing in its twofold mission of preaching and actualising this new dynamic approach to spiritual well-being; and by this standard it will be judged.

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APPENDIX I

Centres and Types of Work

In April, 1957, there were altogether 138 centres in the Math and Mission, including the Headquarters, of which 72 were Mission centres, and 66 Math centres. Of these, 86 were in India, and the rest outside. There were also over 20 sub-centres in India and abroad.

Main types of *permanent* work done by the Math and Mission in 1956 are given here, with the total figures in each category:

I. *Medical service:* 12 indoor Hospitals with 19,523 patients, and 60 outdoor Dispensaries with 25,74,539 cases, including repeated ones.

II. *Educational Work:* (*a*) 53 Students' Homes with 2,668 boys and 311 girls. (*b*) One general first-grade College with 1,565 boys, and another residential intermediate College with 209 boys. (*c*) Two Teachers' Training Colleges with 118 trainees. (*d*) Three Engineering Schools with 445 students. (*e*) A budding Agricultural School. (*f*) 35 High Schools with 10,845 boys and 4,344 girls, and 127 lower-grade Schools with 13,644 boys and 9,369 girls. (*g*) One institution for training auxiliary nurses and midwives—number 80. Number of students in all the institutions taken together—29,465 boys and 14,153 girls.

III. *Spiritual and Cultural Work:* (*a*) Regular classes and occasional lectures arranged from most of the centres. (*b*) Libraries and Reading Rooms in most centres. (*c*) Ten principal publication centres conducting 5 magazines in English and 5 in the Indian languages as well as publishing numerous books in

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English, Spanish and the Indian languages. All are calculated to bring out the spiritual unity of mankind.

Temporary Relief Works were also undertaken during the year. They are included in Appendix III.

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APPENDIX II

Distribution of Centres

In India

West Bengal : Āsānsol, Bānkurā, Barnagore, Belghariā, Belur (2 centres), Calcutta (10 centres), Chandipur, Contai, Dakshineshwar, Garbetā, Jalpāiguri, Jayrāmbāti, Kālimpong, Kāmārpukur, Koālpārā, Māldā, Manasādwip, Midnapore, Raharā, Sārgāchhi, Sarishā, Tāki and Tamluk—33 centres.

Assam : Cherrapunji, Karimganj, Silchar and Shillong.

Bihār : Deoghar, Dungri, Jamshedpur, Jāmtārā, Katihār, Patnā and Rānchi.

Orissa : Bhubaneshwar and Puri (2 centres).

U.P. : Allahabad, Almorā, Benares (2 centres), Barlowganj, Kānpur, Kankhal, Kishenpur, Lucknow, Māyāvati, Shyāmalā Tāl and Vrindāban—12 centres.

Delhi : New Delhi.

Bombay : Bombay, Nāgpur and Rājkot.

Madras : Chingleput, Kānchipuram, Madras (5 centres), Nattarampalli, Ootacamund, Perianāickenpālayam and Salem—11 centres.

Andhra : Rajahmundry and Visākhapatnam.

Kerala : Calicut, Kalady, Quilandy, Tiruvalla, Trichur and Trivandrum.

Mysore : Bangalore, Mangalore, Mysore and Ponnampet.

Outside India

East Pakistan : Bāgerhāt, Bāliāti, Barisāl, Dacca, Dināpur, Faridpur, Habiganj, Mymensingh, Nārāyanganj, Sonārgāon and Sylhet—11 centres.

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Burma : Rangoon (2 centres).
S.E. Asia : Singapore.
Fiji : Nadi.
Ceylon : Colombo.
Mauritius : Port Louis.
France : Gretz (S. *et* M.).
England : London.
United States of America : Berkeley (Calif.), Boston, Chicago, Hollywood, New York (2 centres), Portland (Ore.), Providence (R.I.), San Francisco, Seattle and St. Louis (Mo.)—11 centres.
Argentina (South America): Buenos Aires.

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APPENDIX III

Relief Works Done up to April, 1957

(Only Districts are mentioned)

1. Famine Relief Work:

In Dinājpur, Murshidābād, Santhāl Parganās and 24-Parganās in 1897 ; Kishengarh in 1899-1900 ; Nimār in 1900 ; Noākhāli, Sylhet, Tippera and 24-Parganās in 1906-7 ; Murshidābād and Puri in 1908 ; Balasore, Bānkurā, Cachar, Dacca, Faridpur, Midnapore, Mymensingh, Noākhāli and Tippera in 1915-6 ; Bānkurā, Mānbhum, Puri, Santhāl Parganās and Tippera in 1919 ; Puri in 1920 ; Khulnā in 1921 ; Midnapore and Santhāl Parganās in 1926 ; Bānkurā and Dinājpur in 1928 ; Nadiā and Rangpur in 1931 ; Mymensingh and Pābnā in 1932 ; Bānkurā, Burdwan and Sylhet in 1935 ; Bānkurā, Birbhum, Khulnā, Midnapore and Santhāl Parganās in 1936 ; Saurāshtra in 1939-40 ; Thār and Pārkār in 1940 ; Quilon in 1942 ; Bijāpur in 1943 ; Backerganj, Bānkurā, Birbhum, Cachar, Calcutta, Chittagong, Dacca, Dinājpur, Faridpur, Hooghly, Howrah, Jessore, Khulnā, Māldā, Midnapore, Murshidābād, Mymensingh, Nadiā, Noākhāli, Pābnā, Puri, Quilon, Santhāl Parganās, Sylhet, Tippera and 24-Parganās in 1943-5 ; Bānkurā in 1946-7 ; Darbhangā and Purnea in 1951 ; 24-Parganās in 1952 ; Anantapur, Chittoor, Cuddapah and Kurnool in 1952 ; Āhmednagar and Poona in 1953.

2. Flood Relief Work:

In Bhāgalpur in 1899 ; 24-Parganās in 1900 ; Midnapore and Hooghly in 1909 ; Bānkurā, Hooghly,

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Howrah and Midnapore in 1913-4; Cachar, Noākhāli and Tippera in 1915; Ballia, Benares, Burdwan and Faridpur in 1916; Rājshāhi in 1918; Mathurā in 1918-9; Cuttack, Midnapore and Puri in 1920; Amherst (Burma) in 1920-1; Bānkurā, Hooghly, Faridpur, Midnapore and Rājshāhi in 1922; Arrah and Patnā in 1923; Bhāgalpur, Mathurā, Dehra-Dun and Sahārānpur in 1924; British Malabār, Cochin, Coimbatore, Salem, Tanjore, Travancore and Trichinopoly in 1924; Akyab (Burma) and Midnapore in 1926; Balasore and Kairā in 1927; Cachar, Midnapore, Nowgong and Sylhet in 1929; Lārkānā, Shikārpur and (with Loot) Sukkur in 1930; Dacca, Mymensingh and Pābnā in 1931; Cuttack, Midnapore and Puri in 1933; Nowgong and Sylhet in 1934; Bānkurā, Burdwan and Hooghly in 1935; Arakan (Burma), Cuttack, Kānpur, Māldā and Puri in 1937; Dacca, Faridpur, Māldā and Murshidābād in 1938, Birbhum and Midnapore in 1939; Midnapore in 1940; Surāt and Sylhet in 1941; Burdwan in 1942; Surāt in 1944; Puri in 1944 and 1945; Cachar in 1946; Chittagong in 1946 and 1947; Māldā in 1948; Saurāshtra in 1950; Darbhangā and East and West Godāvari in 1953; Cooch-Behar, Dacca, Darbhangā, Faridpur, East Godāvari, Jalpāiguri and Lakhimpur in 1954; Āzamgarh, Cuttack, Dacca, Darbhangā, Dhubri, Goālpārā, Jaunpur, Māldā, Rāmnād and Tanjore in 1955; Birbhum, Cachar, Dacca, Howrah, Murshidābād, Nowgong and 24-Parganās in 1956; Burdwan, 1956-7.

3. Cyclone and Tornado Relief Work:

In Barisāl, Dacca, Faridpur and Khulnā in 1919; Ganjām in 1923-4; Faridpur in 1926; Nellore in 1927; Mymensingh in 1932; Tanjore in 1934; 24-Parganās in 1935; Guntur in 1936; Ganjām and Puri in 1938; Dacca in 1939; Bombay in 1940; Backerganj, Calicut

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and Trichur in 1941; Balasore and 24-Parganās in 1942-3; Midnapore in 1942-4; East and West Godāvari in 1950-1; Midnapore in 1956; Rāmnād and Tanjore in 1956-7.

4. SANITARY RELIEF WORK:

(*a*) Plague: In Calcutta in 1899-1900; Bhāgalpur in 1904-5 and 1912; Lahore and Rohtak in 1924.

(*b*) During the Gangāsāgar Fair in Saugor Island in 1912 and 1914-25.

(*c*) During the Kumbha Fair at Allahabad in 1930, 1936 and 1948 and at Hardwār in 1938 and 1950.

(*d*) Influenza: In Balasore, Benares, Noākhāli and Puri in 1918-9.

(*e*) Small-pox: In Midnapore in 1936; Bānkurā in 1937.

(*f*) Cholera: In Tehri in 1913; Howrah in 1917, Jalpāiguri in 1924; Hooghly and Purnea in 1925; Māldā and Purnea in 1926; Burdwan in 1929; Purnea in 1930; Midnapore in 1935; Almorā in 1938; Murshidābād in 1941; Dināpur in 1942; Puri in 1945.

5. REFUGEE RELIEF WORK:

In Cachar, Gauhati and Jorhāt in 1942-4; Karnāl in 1947-8; Hooghly, Howrah and 24-Parganās in 1948-9; Nowgong in 1949; Cachar, Calcutta, Cooch-Behar, Dacca, Jessore, Khāsiā and Jaintiā Hills, Māldā, Murshidābād and Patnā in 1950.

6. REFUGEE REHABILITATION WORK:

In Cachar, Hooghly, Māldā, Nadiā, Tripurā and 24-Parganās in 1949-56.

7. FIRE RELIEF WORK:

In Puri in 1915 and 1916; Murshidābād and Mathurā in 1917; Midnapore in 1919; Puri in 1920; Jessore in 1922; Mānbhum, Puri and 24-Parganās in 1923; Birbhum, Burdwan and Kāmrup in 1924;

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Mānbhum in 1925 ; Puri in 1926 ; Puri and 24-Parganās in 1927 ; 24-Parganās in 1928 ; Howrah, Mānbhum and 24-Parganās in 1930 ; Bānkurā and Puri in 1932 ; Birbhum, Jessore, Mānbhum, Murshidābād, Puri and 24-Parganās in 1933 ; Birbhum, Bānkurā and Mānbhum in 1935 ; Puri in 1937 ; Birbhum and Mānbhum in 1938 ; Birbhum, Burdwan, Midnapore, Murshidābād and Puri in 1939 ; Puri in 1940 ; Birbhum in 1941 ; Puri in 1945 ; Madras in 1948.

8. Earthquake and Landslip Relief Work:

In Darjeeling in 1899 ; Dharamsālā in 1905 ; Pegu (Burma) in 1930 ; Bhāgalpur, Champāran, Chaprā, Darbhangā, Monghyr, Muzaffarpur and Patnā in 1934 ; Lakhimpur in 1950-1 ; Kutch in 1956-7.

9. Riot Relief Work:

In Dacca and Mymensingh in 1930 ; Dacca in 1941 ; Patnā in 1946 ; Tippera, Noākhāli and Sylhet in 1946-8.

10. Malaria Relief Work:

In Dacca in 1940 ; Sylhet in 1943-4 ; Midnapore in 1950.

11. Coolie Relief Work:

In Tippera in 1921.

12. Water Scarcity Relief Work:

In Faridpur in 1920-1.

13. A.R.P. Relief Work:

In Calcutta in 1942-4.

14. Cloth Relief Work:

In many districts of Bengal in 1919.

The list is not exhaustive, since some more relief works were organised by the branch centres from time to time.

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